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SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the moſt Reverend

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LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* EIGHTH.

LONDON:

Printed for *R. Ware*, *A. Ward*, *J.* and *P. Knapton*, *T. Longman*, *R. Hett*, *C. Hitch*, *J. Hodges*, *S. Auſten*, *J.* and *R. Tonſon*, *J.* and *H. Pemberton*, and *J. Rivington*.

MDCCXLIII.

SERMON CXXXI.

Concerning our imitation of the divine perfections.

MATT. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

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IN these words we have, first, the absolute perfection of the divine nature supposed, not only in those before-mentioned, of goodness, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatsoever.

Secondly, The perfection of GOD is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of these two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method.

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the divine perfection.

II. To lay down some rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what those divine qualities are which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew that the duty here intended by our SAVIOUR is not impossible to us; and then to draw some useful inferences from the whole.

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The two first I have already spoken to, I now proceed to the third particular, which is, to shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute perfection of the divine nature, yet because there are several perfections of GOD which are incommunicable, and a creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be supposed to be intended for a pattern to us. As the necessity and independency of the divine nature; and the self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the original cause of all things; and consequently supreme Lord and Governor; the immensity and eternity of his being; these, and perhaps several other perfections, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unsufferable pride, and a kind of high treason against the divine Majesty, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own state, as we are creatures, to think to resemble GOD in these excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the sin of Lucifer; an ambition to step into the throne of GOD, and to be like the most High.

So that in our imitation of the divine perfection, we are to keep within the station of creatures, not affecting an independency and sovereignty like the most High, and to be omnipotent as he is, "to "have an arm like GOD, and to thunder with a "voice like him," as the expression is in Job: but to endeavour to resemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, "according to the rate and capacity of a creature," in those divine qualities, and in such measures and degrees,

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degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of.

More especially and chiefly in the moral perfections of the divine nature, such as are his goodness, and mercy, and patience, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness; these, and only these, the scripture seems to comprehend under the name of holiness; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but those which we call moral excellencies and perfections, such as those which I have named; for with these, and hardly with any other, is the holiness of GOD joined in scripture, as "holy "and righteous, holy and true," &c. And therefore when GOD says, "be ye holy, for I am holy," it signifies that we are to imitate GOD in his goodness, and mercy, and patience, and righteousness, and faithfulness, and truth; for these are the holiness of the divine nature, which set him at the greatest distance from that which we call moral impurity and sin.

For that which our SAVIOUR here in the text more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodness of GOD, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of GOD is his goodness to those that are in misery, or are liable to it. The patience of GOD is his mercy in sparing those who have deserved punishment, and are liable to it. And the goodness of GOD is then greatest, when it is exercised towards the evil and unthankful; those who are so far from deserving it, that they have given great and just provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is so remarkable in GOD towards the unworthy and unthankful sons of men, our SAVIOUR recommends to our imitation here in the text. "Be

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" ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which " is in heaven is perfect." Be ye therefore; this particle of inference therefore, hath a plain relation to something spoken before; and if we look back to ver. 44. we shall find our SAVIOUR there enjoining his disciples " to love their enemies, to bless " them that curse them, to do good to them that " hate them, and to pray for those that despight- " fully use them, and persecute them." And by what other argument doth he inforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like GOD, to be good to the evil and unthankful, ver. 45. " That ye may be the children " of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to " rise on the evil and the good; and his rain to " fall on the just, and on the unjust." GOD is good to all, and exerciseth great mercy and patience even towards the evil, and unjust. And then he concludes, that if perfection it self be fit to be a pattern, we should labour after these qualities, " Be " ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which " is in heaven is perfect." So that though the universal perfection of the divine nature be here supposed, yet the attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience, are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the divine perfection is more especially to be understood of those perfections which our SAVIOUR had been discoursing of before, viz. the goodness and mercy of GOD. And that this is undoubtedly so, is evident from St. Luke's rendring this precept, Ch. vi. 36. " Be ye therefore οἰκτίρ- " μονες, *benefici*, ready to do good, full of kind- " ness and benignity; merciful, as your Father which " is in heaven is merciful;" that is, endeavour you

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to be such as I have described GOD to be. And this St. Matthew calls perfection; because the goodness of GOD is his great perfection, and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a lustre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what those perfections of the divine nature are, which our SAVIOUR doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and last place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew, that the duty here required, and intended by our SAVIOUR, (when he says, "Be "ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is "perfect") is not impossible to us. And to this purpose, be pleased to consider these three or four things.

1. That our imitation of GOD is certainly restrained to the communicable perfections of GOD, and such as creatures are capable of, as I have shewn before. For it is so far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like GOD in his peculiar perfections, that it was, probably, the sin of the apostate angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewise to be restrained to such degrees of these perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be so perfectly good, as GOD is; nor partake of any other excellency, in that transcendent degree, in which the divine nature is possessed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of so great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excel in any kind is, *optima quæque exemplа ad imitandum*

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proponere, " to propose the highest and most perfect " examples to our imitation." No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Besides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, so it kindles ambition, and makes men strain and contend to the utmost to do better: and though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be supposed to be our duty, which is absolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reason be supposed to be so, as any thing that can be instanced in: because in such a case, if we do our best, and be continually pressing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raise our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, such a will and endeavour will be acceptable with GOD for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the possibility of our performance, the assurance we have of GOD's goodness will sufficiently secure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reasonably presume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to GOD, and as beneficial to our selves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly

ly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readineſs and chearfulneſs of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do ſomething towards it, we may be ſure that he will be very well pleaſed when he ſees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this caſe reaſon as our SAVIOUR does; "If we that are evil would deal thus with our chil-"dren, how more ſhall our heavenly Father?" The goodneſs of GOD ſignifies very little, if it does not ſignify this, that in any inſtance of real and unqueſtionable goodneſs, GOD is much better than any father upon earth.

However at the worſt, that wherein we fall ſhort of the perfection of the law, may be ſupplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own weakneſs and imperfection, and on GOD's part, by mercy and forgiveneſs, for the ſake of the perfect obedience of our bleſſed Redeemer. This is the leaſt benefit we can expect in this caſe from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the goſpel.

5. And laſtly, which will fully clear this matter, this precept does not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually aſcending and climbing up higher, ſtill advancing from one degree of goodneſs to another, and continually aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance to GOD: and this certainly is poſſible to us, to endeavour to be as like GOD as we can, in this weak and imperfect ſtate.

Whereas any equality with GOD, even in the communicable attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, is not only impoſſible to us in this ſtate of ſin and imperfection, but above the condition of

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a creature, even of "the spirits of just men made "perfect," and of the highest angels in glory: for their perfection is not absolute, but in comparison with our present state. And I think there is no great reason to doubt, but that the blessed spirits above, who continually behold the face of their Father, are still writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us; and endeavouring "to be per-"fect, as their Father which is in heaven is perfect;" still aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of GOD, whose goodness and mercy is so far beyond, and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this seems to be no inconsiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happiness of heaven, that the holiness of good men (which is the similitude of GOD) is never at a stand, nor at it's full growth and period; but that the glorified saints (yea and blessed angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themselves still become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehension is no undervaluing the happiness of heaven, that it is not so perfect at first, as it shall be afterwards; because it is granted on all hands, that the happiness of those good souls, who are already in bliss, shall be more perfect and complete at the resurrection. And why may it not then be continually increasing, and be augmented still more and more, without any stint or final period of it's perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long course of goodness, and to be weary of well doing. But in the other state, when men shall be strongly byassed to goodness, and have nothing to pull them back, it will then be so far from being a trouble, that methinks it

ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to the bleſſed, to find that there is no end of their doing good and becoming better. For if conformity to GOD be the ground and foundation of all happineſs, then our bleſſedneſs will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confeſs, were a diſmal conſideration, to think that in heaven we ſhould be liable to relapſe, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy ſtate. But this is a comfortable conſideration, that our holineſs and happineſs ſhall never be at a ſtand, that it is ſecure ſo far as it goes, and that we cannot loſe what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, ſhould be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at firſt, he ſhall ſtill be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as GOD pleaſeth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future ſtate,) this is certain, that an equality with GOD in any of his perfections is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our SAVIOUR requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine perfection always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourſelves to the neareſt reſemblance of GOD, that poſſibly we can. And if this be our ſincere care and ſtudy, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with GOD, and that he will be graciouſly pleaſed to eſteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that GOD will forgive us where we fall ſhort of the perfection of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had

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done all we could, we must still fall much short of the perfection of GOD's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near so much as we can, and is not conscious to himself that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is so unlike his heavenly Father in goodness and mercy, in righteousness and true holiness; and that he still partakes in so great a measure of those, not only unreasonable and brutish, but even devilish passions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that these ungodlike qualities do so frequently prevail upon us, and have so much dominion over us!

We are so far from being what we ought, in these and many other respects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conscience, and make it our sincere endeavour to subdue ourselves to a conformity to GOD, and to a perfect holiness in his fear.

Would we but often set GOD before our eyes, and represent to ourselves those excellent and amiable perfections of the divine nature, which are so comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we stand so infinitely obliged, his goodness and mercy and patience, upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miserable past recovery; that goodness and patience which he continually exerciseth towards us, (for we provoke him every day,) and exerciseth towards us, on purpose to endear those perfections to us, from which we reap so much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of perfection it self, and the example of him who is so much above us, so no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any interest to be concerned for us; and who being happy in himself, neither

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hopes nor fears any thing from us: I say, by an example that has all these advantages, we might be provoked to be so affected towards one another, (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found GOD to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue; and miserable creatures are we, whenever he ceaseth to be so: and we have reason to fear he will cease to be so, if this example of his goodness and patience towards us, do not transform us into the image of the divine perfections, and prevail upon us to imitate those excellencies, which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

These considerations, taken both from ingenuity and interest, should awaken our sloth, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that perfection which our SAVIOUR here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is set so high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcerned about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfill this precept of our LORD, of "being perfect, as our Father which is in "heaven is perfect."

And yet, let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly Father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from heaven, and the temper of the blessed; so far are we utterly unqualified for the blissful sight and enjoyment of GOD: for unless we be first like him, we cannot see him as he is: only "the pure in heart shall see "GOD," and therefore "every man that has this

"hope

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" hope in him," ſhould " purify himſelf even as " he is pure."

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, diſpatched the four things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine perfections, and to give ſome rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the poſſibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw ſome uſeful inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made; and they ſhall be theſe two.

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of GOD.

II. That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the imitation of GOD.

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of GOD; ſo that even divine revelation it ſelf doth ſuppoſe theſe for it's foundation, and can ſignify nothing to us, unleſs theſe be firſt known and believed. Unleſs we be firſt perſuaded of the providence of GOD, and his particular care of mankind, why ſhould we believe that he would make any revelation of himſelf to men? Unleſs it be naturally known to us, that GOD is true, what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what ſignifies the laws and promiſes of GOD, unleſs natural light do firſt aſſure us of his ſovereign authority and faithfulneſs? So that the principles of natural religion, are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reaſon, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from GOD, which plainly contradicts his eſſential perfection, and, conſequently, if any pretends divine

vine revelation for this doctrine, that GOD hath from all eternity absolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greatest part of mankind, without any respect to the sins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of GOD, as I am sure that GOD is good and just: because this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodness and justice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodness; and therefore if "an apostle or angel from heaven" teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodness and justice of GOD, "let him be accursed." For every man hath greater assurance that GOD is good and just, than he can have of any subtle speculations about predestination and the decrees of GOD.

And for the same reason I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any man or church in the world, that GOD would not have men understand their publick prayers, and the lessons of scripture which are read to them. A lesson not to be understood is nonsense: a lesson is something to be learned, which how it can be without being understood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any person or church whatsoever, that GOD should reveal his will to men in the holy scriptures, with a design to have it hid, and locked up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much less can I believe (which yet is the express doctrine of the council of Trent) that the saving efficacy of the sacrament depends upon the intention of the priest. Which is to say, that though people believe, and live never so well, they may be damned by sholes and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of the priest, and for no other reason, but because he is so wicked

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wicked as not to intend to save them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of GOD's goodness? May we not in this case appeal, as Abraham did, to the goodness and justice of GOD, and expostulate with greater reason than he did, much after the same manner, "Wilt thou destroy "the righteous for the wicked; that be far from thee "to do after this manner." To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people should lye at the mercy of a wicked priest, to be damned or saved at his pleasure, "that be far from thee; shall "not the judge of all the earth do right?" And can there be a greater affront to the goodness and justice of GOD, than to imagine he should deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one instance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatsoever, that our SAVIOUR, in the celebration of his last supper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his disciples, and give his blood shed, before it was shed; that the whole doctrine of Christianity should mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the assurance of which depends upon the certainty of sense; and yet that an essential part of that doctrine should overthrow the certainty of sense. I can never while I live believe these two things, that the last thing our SAVIOUR did before his death, should be to teach his disciples not to believe their own senses, as he must do if he taught them transubstantiation; and that the very first thing he did after he was risen from the dead, should be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of sense for the proof of his resurrection; for when they doubted of his resurrection,

rection, Luke xxiv. 38. "He said unto them, Why "are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in "your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that "it is I my self: handle me, and see, for a spirit "hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they saw, because they saw and felt flesh and bones: is it not as good an argument on the other side, that what they saw in the sacrament was not his real and natural body, because they could neither see nor handle flesh and bones? So that I cannot believe transubstantiation, unless I can believe that truth itself can contradict and destroy itself.

You see of what use it is to have right and steady apprehensions of the divine perfections; that, these being laid for a foundation, we may upon all occasions have recourse to them, and govern our opinions and Reasonings in religion, about all doubtful matters, by such principles as are clear and unquestionable. The

II. Inference is, that the truest and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of the divine perfections, especially the moral perfections of the divine nature, which the scripture is wont to comprehend under the name of holiness; and such are the goodness, and mercy, and patience of GOD, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness. To imitate GOD in these is true religion; or as St. James expresses it, "pure religion, and undefiled," ἀμίαντος, without any flaw or blemish, alluding to precious stones, the greatest commendation of which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio est, imitari quem colis,* "that is religion, to imitate him "whom we worship." This the heathens, by the

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light of nature, did discover to be the great end of religion, and the best worship of the deity, to be like GOD. Pythagoras was wont to say, "that we "honour GOD most, when we are most like him in the "temper and disposition of our minds;" and Plato to the same purpose, "that the height and per- "fection of goodness, is to resemble GOD, as near "as is possible; and that we resemble GOD, "in being just, and holy, and wise." So likewise Hierocles, "that a good man imitates GOD, in the "measures of love and friendship, who hates no "man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." Plutarch hath an excellent discourse about the patience of GOD towards sinners, and gives this as one reason why GOD doth not presently punish offenders; "that he might give an example to us of "gentleness and patience, and check the fury and "violence of men in revenging injuries upon one "another; which nothing will do more effectually, "than to consider that gentleness and forbearance "are an imitation of the divine perfection." And then he cites an excellent saying of Plato, "that "GOD manifested himself, and displayed his per- "fections in the world, for our imitation; true vir- "tue being nothing else, but an imitation of the "divine nature. For there is no greater benefit "man can receive from GOD's hand, than to be- "come virtuous by the imitation and pursuit of "those excellencies and perfections which are in "GOD." Seneca likewise hath many passages to this purpose, *inter viros bonos & Deum amicitia est, imò etiam necessitudo & similitudo*, "between GOD and "good men there is a friendship, yea, and an intima- "cy and likeness;" and that a virtuous man is *discipulus æmulatorque & vera progenies Dei*, "a dis- "ciple

" ciple and imitator, and the very genuine off-
" spring of GOD." So that the light of nature and the reaſon of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and ſenſe of the holy ſcriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to conſiſt in our conformity to GOD, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing elſe but a tranſcript of his nature. The great buſineſs of religion is to do the will of GOD, and " this is the will of GOD, our " ſanctification;" and our ſanctification is our conformity to the holineſs of GOD; and this is the ſcope of the general exhortations of ſcripture, to perſuade us to holineſs, that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the divine nature. 2 Cor. vii. 1. " Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly be-
" loved; let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs
" of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear
" of GOD." 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. " As he which hath
" called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of
" converſation, becauſe it is written, be ye holy,
" for I am holy," 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. ſpeaking of the Chriſtian religion, which he calls " the knowledge
" of him who hath called us to glory and virtue,
" whereby alſo (ſays he) are given unto us exceed-
" ing great and precious promiſes, that by theſe
" we might be partakers of a divine nature, hav-
" ing eſcaped the corruption that is in the world
" through luſt." So that the holineſs the goſpel deſigns to bring us to, is a participation of the divine nature, which we can no otherwiſe partake of, but by an imitation of the divine perfections. This is that which the ſcripture expreſſes to us by the

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terms of regeneration, the new man, and the new creature. And therefore those who are converted from a wicked and sinful state, and reclaimed to goodness, are said "to put on the new man, which "after God is created in righteousness, and the ho- "liness of truth." Eph. iv. 23. "To be renew- "ed after the image of him that created us." Colos. iii. 10. This is to be the sons and children of God, to "imitate and resemble God in our dispositions and "manners. Eph. v. 1. "Be ye therefore, μιμηταὶ "τοῦ θεοῦ, imitators of God, as dear children." Philip ii. 15. "That ye may be blameless and sin- "cere, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst "of a crooked and perverse nation." 1 John iii. 10. "In this the children of God are manifest, and "the children of the devil; whosoever doth not "righteousness is not of God." There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and re- semblance of God in those perfections, wherein he is set forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly consists the practice both of natural religion, and of true Christianity.

But does not religion consist very much in the duties of God's worship, in the exercise of piety and devotion, in constant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodness by praise and thanksgiving, in reading and hearing, and me- ditating upon God's word, in fasting and abstinence, and keeping our bodies in subjection to our spirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy sacrament? to this I answer, that religion doth consist very much in the due performance of these duties, and they are unquestionable and necessary parts of religion, and the

the means appointed by GOD for the begetting and increasing in us such dispositions of mind, as render us most like to GOD, and for the production of all the fruits of goodness and holiness and righteousness in our lives. SERM. CXXXI.

But then it is to be considered, that these exercises of piety and devotion are but the means of religion, and not the ultimate end and design of it. All these do but serve to bring us to a nearer resemblance of GOD; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own sakes only, and we rest in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they lose their nature; because they are not used as means, but rested in, as if they were the end of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal mistake about religion, and think that if they do but serve GOD in their families, and go to church, and behave themselves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain seasons receive the sacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Christians; when all this while they take no care to improve themselves in real goodness, by an inward conformity of their minds to GOD, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their lusts, and subduing their appetites and passions to the laws of reason and religion, by "putting on, as the elect of GOD, bowels of kind-"ness;" by being true and faithful, righteous and just, patient and merciful, "as their Father which "is in heaven is" so; and by "forbearing one "another" in case of provocation, and "forgiv-"ing one another, even as GOD for CHRIST's sake "hath forgiven us; by purifying themselves as GOD "is pure," and endeavouring to "be holy in all "manner of conversation, as he who hath called "them

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" them is holy;" when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and, to ſerve their covetouſneſs, will ſtrain a point of truth or juſtice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or ſome ſuch urgent neceſſity, in point of decency and reputation, that for ſhame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their paſſions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterneſs, their tongues of ſlander and evil-ſpeaking, their humours as proud, and ſurly, and cenſorious, as theirs can be who are openly prophane, and ſeem to neglect and deſpiſe all religion: and yet becauſe they ſerve GOD (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good church-men, and attend upon the ordinances of GOD, they think they have diſcharged the whole buſineſs of religion admirably well, and are very good children of GOD, and in a ſtate of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all theſe duties, and the uſe of all theſe means ſeparated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of our ſelves to GOD, in thoſe qualities and diſpoſitions which I have mentioned, is ſo far from finding acceptance with GOD, that it is an abomination to him. So GOD every where declares in ſcripture, telling us, that " the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD," and that he diſdains to be praiſed by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unleſs with " the praiſes we offer " to him, we order our converſation aright, we " ſhall not ſee the ſalvation of GOD." With what contempt does he ſpeak of this formal and external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! " To what purpoſe is the multitude of

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" your ſacrifices to me? Will the LORD be pleaſed " with thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of " rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, " what is good; and what doth the LORD require " of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and " to walk humbly with thy GOD? Is not this the " faſt which I have choſen, to break the bands of " wickedneſs, and to let the oppreſſed go free; to " deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring " the poor, that are caſt out, to thine houſe; when " thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and " that thou hide not thy ſelf from thine own fleſh."

Nor is it hearing of the word that will avail us, unleſs we be doers of it. " Bleſſed are they (ſays " our SAVIOUR) that hear the word of GOD, and " keep it. He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, " and doth them, ſhall be likened to a wiſe man, " who hath built his houſe upon a rock." Nor will bare receiving the ſacrament recommend us to GOD; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon our ſelves, to abſtain from all ſin and wickedneſs; otherwiſe " we tread under foot " the ſon of GOD, and prophane the blood of the " covenant, whereby we ſhould be ſanctified, as if " it were an unholy thing." Can any man think that to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads thoſe plain words of St. James? " If any man among you ſeem to be " religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but de- " ceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. " Pure religion and undefiled before GOD and the " Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows " in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted " from the world." When religion produceth

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theſe real effects, then the means of religion do truly ſerve the end of it, and we are not only "hearers "of the word, but doers of it," and "ſhall be "bleſſed in our deed."

So that as there is an obligation upon us to uſe the means of religion, which GOD hath inſtituted, with great care and conſcience; ſo we ſhould chiefly mind that, which is the end of all religion, which is to make us partakers of a divine nature, and make us like to GOD, eſpecially in thoſe amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodneſs, his mercy and patience. Theſe, becauſe they are the primary perfections of GOD, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indiſpenſable obligation; becauſe they have their foundation in the nature of GOD, which is fixt and unalterable. And all poſitive inſtitutions, when they come in competition with theſe, are to ſtoop and vail to them. Natural and moral duties, eſpecially thoſe of goodneſs, and mercy, and charity, are ſo ſtrongly bound upon us, that nothing in any revealed religion can cancel the obligation of them, or juſtify the violation of theſe great and indiſpenſable laws. Our SAVIOUR in his religion has declared nothing to the prejudice of them: but, on the contrary, has ſtraitned our obligation to them, as much as is poſſible: "The ſon of man came not "to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them;" ſo that they "know not what manner of ſpirit they are "of," who think to pleaſe GOD by hating men, who are made after the image of GOD, and "by kill-"ing one another, to do him good ſervice;" who, to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil ſocie-

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ty, undermine government, and disturb the peace of mankind.

Whereas our SAVIOUR did not by any thing in his religion design to alter the civil government of the world, or to lessen and diminish the rights of princes, or to set men loose from allegiance to them, or to make treason and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous massacres lawful, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope; but yet he deposed no princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion; he hath assumed no such power to himself. "By what authority "then doth his vicar do these things? and who "gave him this authority?" Our LORD tells us plainly, "his kingdom was not of this world;" and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this power the pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time, disturbing the peace of nations, and exercising the most barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for GOD and religion: as if because religion is so very good a thing in itself, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for it's sake; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the world, GOD and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the minds of men any reverence and esteem for religion, we must take heed how we destroy the principles of natural religion, and undermine the peace and happiness of human

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ſociety, for the glory of GOD, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err: for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconſiſtent with the eſſential perfections of GOD, and with the peace and order of the world: for "GOD is not the GOD of confuſion, but of or-"der;" which St. Paul appealeth to, as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: but they that pretend that religion prompts men to ſedition and cruelty, do repreſent GOD as the GOD of confuſion, and not of order.

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion; let us place it in that which is unqueſtionable, the imitation of the divine perfections, and let us (as the apoſtle exhorts) "put on, as the elect of "GOD, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, "long-ſuffering, and above all, let us put on cha-"rity, which is the very bond of perfection." The great perfection of the divine nature, or rather the very eſſence of GOD is love. So St. John ſpeaks, "GOD is love, and he that dwelleth in love, "dwelleth in GOD, and GOD in him." And it is very remarkable that in theſe very qualities of charity, and kindneſs, and compaſſion, which we peculiarly call humanity, we approach neareſt to the divinity it ſelf, and that the contrary diſpoſitions do transform us into wild beaſts and devils.

And yet as ſeverely as I ſpeak againſt theſe principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compaſſion for thoſe who are under the power of ſo great a deluſion, and upon a pretence of being made the only true Chriſtians in the world, are ſeduced from

from humanity it self, and so far from being made good Christians by these principles, that they are hardly left to be men; "being blinded, and led by "the blind, they fall into the ditch" of the grossest and foulest immoralities; such as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no bible in the world.

Not but that we protestants have our faults and our follies too, and those (GOD knows) too many and too visible; we possess more truth, but there is little peace among us; and yet GOD is as well and as often in scripture called "the GOD of peace," as "the "GOD of truth." In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animosities, of schisms and divisions, "and the "way of peace we have not known." GOD grant that at last "in this our day" (when it concerns us so much) we may "know the things that belong "to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes."

You see in what things the practice of religion mainly consists, in our likeness to GOD, and resemblance of him in holiness and goodness; and without this we are utterly incapable of happiness: we cannot see GOD, unless we be like him. The presence of GOD can administer no pleasure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate sin, and delight in purity and holiness, we can have no delightful communion with the holy GOD; till our passions be subdued, and our souls dispossest of those devilish and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience, and till we be endued with the spirit of universal goodness and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father; we are not qualified

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to dwell with GOD, who is love and dwells in love. So far as we are defective in theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſo far we fall ſhort of the temper of happineſs.

There is a direct and eternal oppoſition between the holy and good GOD, and the evil diſpoſitions of wicked men, and till this oppoſition be removed, it is impoſſible we ſhould find any felicity in the enjoyment of GOD. Now the nature of GOD is fixt and unchangeable, GOD cannot recede from his own perfection, and therefore we muſt quit our ſins: thou canſt not change GOD, therefore change thy ſelf, and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, " with whom is no variableneſs nor " ſhadow of turning." GOD condeſcended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happineſs; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

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The happineſs of GOD.

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1 TIM. i. 11. *The bleſſed* GOD—

The whole verſe runs thus,

According to the glorious goſpel of the bleſſed GOD, *which was committed to my truſt.*

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SINCE all men naturally deſire happineſs, and thirſt after it; methinks we ſhould all deſire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how

how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What Job says of wisdom, may be said also of happiness, "GOD understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the "place thereof." He only, who is perfectly possest of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it. SERM. CXXXII.

So that to direct us in our search after happiness, the best way will be to contemplate and consider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of happiness, the original spring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon these words, wherein the apostle attributes this perfection of blessedness or happiness to GOD, "The blessed GOD."

And though this be as essential a part as any other of that Notion which mankind have of GOD from the light of nature, yet I no where find in all the new testament, this attribute of happiness given to GOD, but only twice in this epistle. 'Tis true indeed, the title of blessedness is frequently given both to GOD and CHRIST, but in another sense, and in a quite different notion: as Mark xiv. 61. where the high-priest asks our SAVIOUR, "Art thou the CHRIST, "the Son of the blessed, τῦ εὐλογητῦ, of him that "is celebrated and praised;" and 2 Cor. xi. 31. "The GOD and Father of our LORD JESUS "CHRIST, who is blessed for evermore." So likewise, Rom. i. 25. "The Creator blessed for ever-"more:" Which likewise is said of CHRIST, Rom. ix. 5. "Of whom CHRIST came, who is over all, "GOD blessed for evermore; that is, for ever to "be praised and celebrated." But in all these texts the Greek word is εὐλογητὸς, which though we translate blessed, yet it is a quite different notion from the

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the title of bleſſedneſs which is given to GOD in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητὸς, but μακάριος, "the bleſſed, or happy GOD;" and this title is not any where in all the new teſtament, (that I know of) given to GOD, but here in the text, and Chap. vi. v. 15. where our LORD JESUS CHRIST (who alſo is GOD) is called "the bleſſed and the only potentate." And whether this title of "the bleſſed, or the happy GOD," be here in the text given to GOD the Father, or to his eternal Son, our LORD JESUS CHRIST; is not ſo much material to my preſent purpoſe to enquire. For, ſuppoſe it be CHRIST who is here called "the bleſſed GOD;" this however is certain, that bleſſedneſs or happineſs is a title belonging to GOD, which is all that is neceſſary for a foundation of my preſent diſcourſe.

In ſpeaking of this argument, I ſhall do theſe three things.

I. Shew what we are to underſtand by the happineſs of GOD, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to GOD, and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy.

III. How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: and ſhall then make ſome inferences from my diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. I will conſider what we are to underſtand by the bleſſedneſs or happineſs of GOD, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it. Now the notion of happineſs taken at it's higheſt pitch (as we muſt neceſſarily do when we apply it to GOD) is no other than a fixt and immoveable ſtate of contentment and ſatisfaction, of pleaſure and delight, reſulting from the ſecure poſſeſſion, and enjoyment of all that is good and

and deſirable, that is, of all excellency and perfection; ſo that theſe following ingredients muſt go to make up a perfect ſtate of happineſs.

1. Perfect knowledge, to underſtand what it is that conſtitutes happineſs, and to know when one is really poſſeſt of it. For as he is not happy, who is ſo only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleaſed with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: So on the other hand, he that has all other neceſſary ingredients of happineſs, and only wants this, that he doth not think himſelf ſo, cannot be happy. For this we often ſee in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumſtances of a worldly happineſs about them, yet by the unſkilful management of the matter, and from a lightneſs and injudiciouſneſs of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard ſhift, even when they are in as good circumſtances as it is almoſt poſſible for men to be in this world, to be very diſcontented and miſerable in their own opinions. But GOD perfectly knows both what makes happineſs, and that he is poſſeſt of it.

2. To perfect happineſs is likewiſe required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happineſs, and likewiſe to check and controul whatever would be an hindrance and diſturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-ſufficient, and hath not within it's power and reach whatever is neceſſary to an happy condition, and neceſſary to ſecure and continue that happineſs againſt all attempts and accidents whatſoever.

3. There is wiſdom alſo required to direct this power, and manage it in ſuch a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very dif-

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ferent from mere power, abſtractedly conſidered; for one may have all the materials of happineſs, and yet want the wiſdom and ſkill to put them ſo together, as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly underſtand the proper method and means of compaſſing and ſecuring his own happineſs.

4. Another moſt conſiderable and eſſential ingredient of happineſs is goodneſs; without which, as there can be no true majeſty and greatneſs, ſo neither can there be any felicity or happineſs. Now goodneſs is a generous diſpoſition of mind to communicate and diffuſe itſelf, by making others partakers of it's happineſs in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, and as wiſdom ſhall direct: For he is not ſo happy as he may be, who hath not the pleaſure of making others ſo, and of ſeeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the higheſt pleaſure (I had almoſt ſaid pride, but I may truly ſay glory) of a good and great mind: For by ſuch communications of himſelf, an immenſe and all-ſufficient being doth not leſſen himſelf, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himſelf; and does, as I may ſay, give great eaſe and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the leaſt diminution of his power and happineſs. For the cauſe and original of all other beings can make nothing ſo independent upon itſelf, as not ſtill to maintain his intereſt in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel againſt his maker, without extreme hazard to himſelf.

5. Perfect happineſs doth imply the exerciſe of all other virtues, which are ſuitable to ſo perfect a being, upon all proper and fitting occaſions; that is, that ſo perfect a being do nothing that is contrary

trary to, or unbecoming his holineſs and righteouſneſs, his truth and faithfulneſs, which are eſſential to a perfect being; and for ſuch a being to act contrary to them in any caſe, would be to create diſquiet and diſturbance to itſelf: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to it's own nature without reluctancy and diſpleaſure, which in moral agents is that which we call guilt: for guilt is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from the conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, ſomething that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befal ſo perfect and immutable a being as GOD is.

6. Perfect happineſs implies in it the ſettled and ſecure poſſeſſion of all thoſe excellencies and perfections; for if any of theſe were liable to fail, or be diminiſhed, ſo much would be taken off from perfect and complete happineſs. If the Deity were ſubject to any change or impairment of his condition, ſo that either his knowledge, or power, or wiſdom, or goodneſs, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of happineſs. And from all theſe does reſult in the

7th and laſt place, Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction, pleaſure and delight, which is the very eſſence of happineſs.

1. Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction in this condition. And well may happineſs be contented with itſelf; that is, with ſuch a condition, that he that is poſſeſt of it, can neither deſire it ſhould be better, nor have any cauſe to fear it ſhould be worſe.

2. Pleaſure and delight, which is ſomething more than contentment: for one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleaſure and delight. "No "affliction is joyous for the preſent, but grievous," as the apoſtle ſpeaks Heb. xii. But there cannot be perfect happineſs without pleaſure in our condition. Full pleaſure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expreſt in words, but certainly known by inward ſenſe and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to deſcribe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expreſſions of GOD, the happineſs of the divine nature, and wherein it conſiſts. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to GOD; and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy; and this is ſo univerſal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very ſuperfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpoſe; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity, *beatiſſimam & perfectiſſimam naturam*, "the moſt "happy and moſt perfect being," and therefore happy, becauſe felicity doth naturally reſult from perfection. It ſhall ſuffice to take notice of theſe two things out of heathen writers, to my preſent purpoſe.

1. That they accounted happineſs ſo eſſential to the notion of a GOD, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to GOD, and what not; to conſider, what things are conſiſtent with happineſs, or inconſiſtent with it; and whatever did ſignify happineſs, and was a perfection conſiſtent with it, they aſcribed to

GOD,

GOD, as a ſuitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwiſe, they removed it from GOD, as unfit to be ſaid of him.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philoſophers concerning the perfections of the divine nature, they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it; even Epicurus himſelf, who ſo boldly attempted to ſtrip the divine nature of moſt of it's perfections, by denying that GOD either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the firſt cauſe and original of all things, and his goodneſs likewiſe, and wiſdom, and power, and juſtice; or at leaſt made all theſe uſeleſs, by taking away all occaſion and opportunity for the exerciſe of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profeſs to believe the happineſs of the divine nature; and then out of an ignorant and officious kindneſs to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the ſecurity of his felicity, did, in effect, take away his other perfections; he would by no means put GOD to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, leſt this ſhould diſcompoſe the Deity, or be an interruption or diſturbance of his eaſe and felicity. For thus Lucretius, the great diſciple of Epicurus, deſcribes his opinion of the divine nature:

Omnis enim divûm, per ſe, natura neceſſe eſt,
Immortali ævo ſummâ cum pace fruatur,
Semota à noſtris rebus, ſejunctaque longè.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipſa ſuis pollens opibus, nihil indiga noſtri,
Nec benè promeritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

That is, "It is neceſſary that the divine nature "ſhould be happy, and therefore altogether un- "concerned in our affairs; free from all grief and

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" danger, ſufficient for itſelf, and ſtanding in need " of no body, neither pleaſed with our good actions, " nor provoked by our faults." This was a very falſe notion both of GOD and happineſs, to imagine that the care of the world ſhould be a pain and diſturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs. But this is not now my buſineſs to conſider; that which is to my preſent purpoſe, is, that the happineſs of the divine nature was univerſally owned; and that bleſſedneſs is ſo inſeparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever profeſſes to believe a GOD, muſt acknowledge him to be perfectly happy.

As for the teſtimony of ſcripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of μακάριος, the happy or bleſſed, is given to GOD; but by conſequence the ſcripture every where declares the happineſs of the divine nature, viz. wherever it ſpeaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and of the eternity and unchangeableneſs of theſe, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of theſe perfections. I ſhall now proceed to the

III. And laſt thing which I propoſed to conſider, viz. How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of abſolute and perfect happineſs, becauſe that reſults from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in GOD: it remains then, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the reſemblance of GOD, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeneſs

to

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to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are creatures of a finite power, and limited underſtandings, and a mutable nature, we do neceſſarily want many of thoſe perfections, which are the cauſe and ingredients of a perfect happineſs. We are far from being ſufficient for our own happineſs; we are neither ſo of our ſelves, nor can we make our ſelves ſo by our own power; for neither are we wiſe enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own ſatisfaction. All the happineſs that we are capable of is, by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made "partakers of the divine nature," (as St. Peter ſpeaks) by our reſemblance of GOD in thoſe perfections which are the moſt eſſential ingredients of happineſs, his goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and holineſs; theſe do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendſhip of Almighty GOD, and for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of GOD, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendſhip and good-will to us, ſupplies all the defects of power and wiſdom in us: for GOD being our friend, we have an intereſt in all his perfections, and a ſecurity, that, as occaſion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; ſo that though we are "weak in our ſelves," we are "ſtrong in the "LORD, and in the power of his might," and are "able to do all things through him ſtrengthning "us;" and though "we want wiſdom," we may have free recourſe to the fountain of it, and "aſk "of GOD, who gives to all liberally, and upbraid-"eth not." And it is next to having theſe perfections in our ſelves, to know where to have them for

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aſking, whenever we ſtand in need of them, ſo far as is neceſſary to our happineſs.

So that though our happineſs depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify our ſelves for it, (and GOD is always ready to aſſiſt us by his grace to this purpoſe) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as ſafe and happy in GOD's care and protection of us, as if we were ſufficient for our ſelves. However, this is the higheſt happineſs that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects ſupplied in ſo liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourſe to the fountain of happineſs, and at laſt to be admitted to the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him, "in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at "whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore." I have done with the three things I propoſed to ſpeak to.

But to what purpoſe, may ſome ſay, is this long deſcription and diſcourſe of happineſs? How are we the wiſer and the better for it? I anſwer; very much, in ſeveral reſpects.

1. This plainly ſhews us, that atheiſm is a very melancholy and miſchievous thing; it would take away the fountain of happineſs, and the only perfect pattern of it; it endeavours at once to extinguiſh the being of GOD, and all the life and comfort of mankind, ſo that we could neither form any idea of happineſs, or be in any poſſibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not ſufficient for it of our ſelves; and if there be not a GOD, there is nothing that can make us ſo. GOD is "the true light of the "world," and a thouſand times more neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of mankind, than the ſun itſelf, which is but a dark ſhadow of that infinitely more

more bright and glorious being; "the happy and "only potentate" (as the apoſtle deſcribes him in the latter end of this epiſtle) "who only hath immor-"tality, dwelling in that light which no man can "approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor can "ſee," meaning in this mortal ſtate.

So that the greateſt enemies, and moſt injurious of all others to mankind, are thoſe who would baniſh the belief of a GOD out of the world; becauſe this is "to lay the ax to the root of the tree," and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happineſs from mankind. So that he is a fool indeed, that "ſays in "his heart, there is no GOD;" that is, that wiſheth there were none; becauſe it is not poſſible for a man to wiſh worſe to himſelf, and more effectually to deſtroy his own happineſs.

2. If the divine nature be ſo infinitely and compleatly happy, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happineſs of another life, which the ſcripture deſcribes to us, by the ſight and enjoyment of GOD. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happineſs that is abſolutely and infinitely perfect, becauſe our nature is but finite, and limited; but the bleſſed GOD, who is infinitely happy himſelf, can alſo make us happy according to our finite meaſure and capacity. For, as he that is the firſt and original being, can communicate being to other things; ſo he that is the fountain of happineſs, can derive and convey happineſs to his creatures.

And we ſhall the more eaſily believe this, when we conſider that goodneſs, as it is the prime perfection, ſo it is likewiſe the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himſelf, and ſhed abroad his goodneſs; and the high-

eſt

eſt expreſſion of the divine goodneſs, is to communicate happineſs to his creatures, and to be willing that they ſhould ſhare and partake with him in it. Baſe and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themſelves, and are loth that others ſhould take part with them; but the moſt noble and moſt generous minds are moſt free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themſelves, unleſs they find or make others ſo.

This is the higheſt pitch of goodneſs, and conſequently the higheſt contentment, and the ſupreme delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be moſt frequent and abundant in thoſe acts in which it finds the greateſt pleaſures; to be good, and to do good, is the ſupreme felicity of GOD himſelf; therefore we may eaſily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and that he is alſo willing to make us abundantly ſo, and to advance us to the higheſt degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render our ſelves incapable of ſuch a bleſſing, by an obſtinate refuſal of it, and utter indiſpoſition for it.

This, I ſay, is very credible, becauſe the happineſs of GOD himſelf conſiſts in that propenſion and diſpoſition of nature, which tends to make others happy. And if there can be any acceſſion to that which is infinite, GOD himſelf finds a new pleaſure and felicity in the communication of his goodneſs to his creatures; and therefore is repreſented in ſcripture, as glad of "the converſion of a ſinner," becauſe the ſinner hereby becomes capable of the happineſs which GOD deſigned for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they

they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, bestow it upon them. SERM. CXXXII.

There are two things which raise our hopes and expectation of good from any person; if he be able and willing to bestow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer happiness upon us, it is he who is infinitely possest of it, and hath all the treasures of it in himself, and that GOD only is, who, as he is able so is willing to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happiness to make others happy; for even that goodness, which inclines him to communicate happiness to others, is a great part of his own felicity; so that, as our SAVIOUR argues, "because I live, you "shall live also," we may reason in like manner, that "because GOD is happy, we shall be happy also," if we do but sincerely desire and endeavour to qualify our selves for it. The goodness of GOD does strongly incline him to desire our happiness, and makes him willing and ready to bestow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the goodness of GOD is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a blessed immortality. It is the happiness of the divine nature to communicate himself; and the communications of GOD's goodness to us are the cause of our happiness; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodness of GOD ought always to be represented to the greatest advantage, and we should endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief and persuasion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodness than is to be found in any of the sons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vin-

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dicate GOD from all ſuſpicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men ſhould be averſe from theſe ſo agreeable and delightful apprehenſions of GOD; or how it ſhould be any man's intereſt to leſſen the goodneſs of GOD; for moſt certainly the better GOD is in himſelf, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been ſaid concerning the happineſs of the divine nature, we may learn wherein our happineſs muſt conſiſt, namely, in the image, and in the favour of GOD; in the favour of GOD as the cauſe of our happineſs; and in the image of GOD, as a neceſſary inward diſpoſition and qualification for it. Unleſs GOD love us, we cannot be happy, for miſerable are they whom he hates; for GOD to ſay of any man, that "his ſoul hath no pleaſure "in him," imports as great miſery, and as dreadful a curſe as can be imagined, and his ſoul can have no pleaſure in a bad man; for "he loveth "righteouſneſs and hateth iniquity, he is not a GOD "that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall "evil dwell with him; the wicked ſhall not ſtand "in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniqui-"ty." Nay, if we could ſuppoſe that he could love and take pleaſure in any perſon that is unlike to him (which is impoſſible) yet that perſon could not be happy, becauſe he would want that inward frame and diſpoſition of mind, which is neceſſary to happineſs. For the very ſame cauſes and ingredients which make up the happineſs of GOD, muſt in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwiſe we cannot be happy; no, though a man were in heaven, if he be ſtill a bad man, *cælum non animum mutavit*, he hath only changed the climate, and is gone into

another country, but he bears himself still about him, and his mind is not changed, which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than any place or outward circumstance whatsoever. A bad man, whereſoever he goes, hath a root of gall and bitterness within him, and is miserable from himself; he hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conscience. SERM. CXXXII.

For there is a certain temper and disposition of mind, that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness and goodness, which is the nature of GOD; and so much as any person departs from this temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from happiness: and as sin is a departure from GOD, so the punishment of it is likewise expreſt by departing from him; "depart from me ye "curſed; depart from me all ye that work iniqui- "ty, I know you not."

And this is one great part of the misery of those degenerate and accurſed spirits, the devils, who are for ever baniſhed from the presence of GOD, that they are of a temper quite contrary to GOD, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, mischievous and cruel; and such a temper is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil disposition of our minds; and till this be cured, and set right, it is as impossible for any of us to be happy, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease. And the external presence of GOD, and a local heaven (if we could imagine such a person to be admitted into it, and see all the glories of that place, and the pleasures and delights of that state) all this, I say, would signify no more to make a bad man happy, than heaps of gold and diamonds, and consorts of the most delicious mu-

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ſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich and coſtly bed would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone; becauſe the man hath that within which torments him, and until that be removed, he cannot poſſibly be at eaſe. The man's ſpirits are out of order, and off the hinges, and toſt from it's center, and till they be ſet right, and reſtored to their proper place and ſtate by goodneſs and holineſs, the man will be perpetually reſtleſs, and cannot poſſibly have any eaſe or peace in his mind: for how can there be peace, how can there be happineſs to him, who is of a temper directly oppoſite to it? "The wicked," ſaith the prophet, Iſa. lvii. 20, 21. "is like the troubled ſea when it "cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt." So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our conſciences, they will be reſtleſly working; "there is no peace, ſaith my GOD, to the "wicked." The Hebrew word which we tranſlate peace, ſignifies all kind of happineſs; there can be no felicity to a bad man. The conſideration whereof ſhould put us upon the moſt ſerious and earneſt endeavours to be like GOD, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of happineſs, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy.

I have been ſo long upon this argument, on purpoſe to convince men of the neceſſity of holineſs and goodneſs, and all other virtues, to our preſent and future happineſs. They underſtand not the nature of happineſs, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of happineſs, he that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot make us ſo in any other way, than by planting in us ſuch a diſpoſition of mind,

mind, as is in truth a participation of the divine nature, and by endowing us with ſuch qualities as are the neceſſary materials and ingredients of happineſs. There is no way to partake of the felicity of GOD bleſſed for ever, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful as he is.

All men naturally deſire happineſs, and ſeek after it, and are as they think travelling towards it, but generally they miſtake their way. Many are eager in the purſuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleaſures and riches and honour, as if theſe could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and ſhadows, and that there is no real and ſubſtantial felicity in them. "Many ſay, who will ſhew us any "good?" Meaning the good things of this world, corn, and wine, and oil: but wouldſt thou be happy indeed? Endeavour to be like the pattern of happineſs, and the fountain of it; addreſs thy ſelf to him in the prayer of the pſalmiſt, "LORD, lift thou up "upon me the light of thy countenance, and thou "ſhalt put more joy and gladneſs into my heart," than the men of the world can have, when their corn and their wine increaſeth.

Many ſay, lo here, and lo there! That happineſs is in a great place, or in a plentiful eſtate, or in the enjoyment of ſenſual pleaſures and delights; but believe them not: happineſs is ſomething that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is within thee, in thine heart, and in the very inward frame and diſpoſition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we muſt be like the bleſſed GOD, we muſt be holy, and merciful, and good, and juſt, as he is, and then we are ſecure of his favour; for "the righteous LORD lov-

"eth

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" eth righteouſneſs, and his countenance will be-
" hold the upright." Then we ſhall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleaſure in communion with him, becauſe we ſhall be like him. For the ſureſt foundation of love and friendſhip is a ſimilitude of temper and diſpoſition; every thing naturally affects it's own likeneſs, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it; and gladly runs into the embraces of it. GOD and man muſt be like one another, before they can take pleaſure in one another: if we be unlike to GOD, it is in the nature of the thing impoſſible that we ſhould be happy in one another, and therefore there muſt be a change either in GOD or us, to bring about this likeneſs. The nature of GOD is inflexible, fixt, and unchangeable; therefore change thy ſelf, ſinner, and endeavour to be like GOD; for ſince he cannot depart from his holineſs, and purity, thou muſt leave thy ſins, and be holy as he is holy, if ever thou hopeſt to be happy, as he is: " every man that hath this hope in him," muſt " purify himſelf, even as he is pure."

" Now to this happy and only Potentate, King of
" kings, and LORD of lords, who only hath im-
" mortality, and dwelleth in that light which no
" man can approach unto, whom no man hath
" ſeen, or can ſee; to him be honour, and pow-
" er everlaſting. Amen."

SERMON

SERMON CXXXIII.

The unchangeableneſs of GOD.

JAMES i. 17.

With whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

The whole period runs thus.

Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

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THE connexion and dependance of theſe words upon the former is briefly this; the apoſtle had aſſerted before, that GOD is not the author of ſin and evil, ver. 13, 14. "Let no man ſay when "he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD, for GOD "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he "any man: but every man is tempted, when he is "drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed;" and here in the text he aſſerts, that GOD is the fountain and author of all good;" do not err, my beloved "brethren;" as if he had ſaid, do not miſtake me, though ſin and evil be not from GOD, but from ourſelves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from GOD, and not from ourſelves: though we be the authors of the ſins we commit, yet we are not ſo of the good that we do, that is from GOD; "e-"very good gift, and every perfect gift is from a-"bove, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from GOD, but wholly from ourſelves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourſelves, but from

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from GOD; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of our ſelves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from GOD, who is the fountain of goodneſs and perfection, and can never be otherwiſe, and can never change nor ceaſe to be ſo, "for with him is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow "of turning."

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift;" all that goodneſs, and all thoſe degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the higheſt angels or ſaints, in the beſt of the ſons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodneſs or happineſs in any of them, "is from above," that is from heaven, it is "the gift of GOD," and "com-"eth down" from that perfect, good, and glorious being, whom the apoſtle here calls "the Father of "lights," in alluſion to the ſun, which is a kind of univerſal benefactor to the world, and liberally diſpenſeth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the ſun changeth it's habitudes and poſitions in reference to us, and varies it's ſhadows; it riſeth and ſets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwiſe with this intellectual and immaterial ſun, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no varia-"bleneſs, nor ſhadow of turning," παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, which are all aſtronomical words; the firſt, παραλλαγὴ, ſignifies the various habitudes and poſitions wherein the ſun appears to us every day, at it's riſing, in the meridian, and when it ſets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly courſe of the ſun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or ſouthern tropicks; and hence it is that it caſts ſeveral ſhadows to people in ſeveral coun-

tries;

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tries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκίασμα, "caſting of ſhadows," being joined with τροπὴ, ſignifies the variation of the ſhadows according to the courſe and motion of the ſun.

But GOD is an eternal ſpring of light, which never riſes or ſets, which hath no mixture of ſhadow nor darkneſs, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the ſame free and liberal diſpenſer of good things to his creatures; "the Father of lights, with "whom there is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turning;" which words ſignify "the immutable perfection "and goodneſs of the divine nature," which ſhall (by GOD's aſſiſtance) be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe; in which I ſhall proceed in this method:

Firſt, I ſhall briefly explain what is meant by the immutability, or unchangeableneſs, of the divine nature.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew that this is a perfection eſſential to GOD, to be immutably what he is, that is good and perfect.

Thirdly, I ſhall anſwer an objection which lies againſt it, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of GOD's repenting himſelf. And

Fourthly, apply the conſideration of it to our ſelves.

I. For the explication of it. By the immutability of GOD, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the ſame; that he undergoes no changes either of his eſſence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the unchangeableneſs of his being, he is ſaid to be "eter-"nal, incorruptible, and only to have immortali-"ty." In reference to his perfections, he is always the ſame infinitely wiſe, and good, and powerful, and holy, and juſt being; from whence it follows,

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that he is conſtant and immutable in all his decrees and counſels, his purpoſes and promiſes. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all thoſe qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purpoſes, reſolutions, and actions; we are continually growing or decreaſing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; ſometimes wiſe, and oftner fooliſh, ſtronger and weaker, better or worſe, as it happens, and as we order our ſelves, continually waxing or waining in our knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purpoſes, and break our promiſes, and contradict our firmeſt and moſt ſerious reſolutions, and ſpeak a thing and do it not, ſay it and do not bring it to paſs; but GOD is everlaſtingly the ſame in all his perfections, conſtant to his intentions, ſteady to his purpoſes, immutably fixed and perſevering in all his decrees and reſolutions. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew that this perfection is eſſential to GOD, to be unchangeably what he is. And this I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt both from natural reaſon, and from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, which tells us, that nothing argues greater weakneſs and imperfection than inconſtancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one ſtate: this is the vanity of the world in general, that "the faſhion of "it paſſeth away;" and of man in particular, that he is liable to ſo many natural changes, by age, and diſeaſes, and death; for which reaſon, he is ſaid by

the Pſalmiſt, to be, " in his beſt eſtate, altogether " vanity :" and that he is liable to ſo many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his underſtanding, and to alter his opinion ſo often, to be ſo fickle in his will, and to change ſo often his purpoſes and reſolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconſtancy to perſons of the weakeſt age and underſtanding; as children, who are liable " to be toſt to " and fro, and carried about with every wind," as the apoſtle ſpeaks, Eph. iv. 14.

Now if the divine nature were ſubject to change, this would caſt an univerſal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obſcure all other excellencies, and make them " like the flower of the field," which, how gay and glorious ſoever, is fading and periſhing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be; for as " the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt," ſo the better any thing is, ſo much the worſe it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in GOD would darken all his other perfections, ſo would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and eſteem of GOD, would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or eſteem for a being that is fickle and inconſtant; if his power and juſtice were uncertain, his threatnings would in a great meaſure loſe their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulneſs could fail, no promiſes and declarations, how gracious ſoever, would be any ſecurity or firm ground of truſt and confidence.

And this reaſoning is not the reſult of divine revelation, but clearly founded in the natural notions

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and ſuggeſtions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two teſtimonies to this purpoſe, of thoſe who had no other guide but natural light. Plato, in his phœdo, enquires, "whether the moſt perfect "(that is GOD) be always the ſame, or ſometimes "thus, and ſometimes otherwiſe? that is, (ſaith "he) whether that which is equality and goodneſs "and bounty itſelf, receives any the leaſt change "at any time, and be not conſtant and uniform, "and of itſelf always the ſame, Καὶ ἐδαμῆ ἐδαμῶς "ἀλλόωσιν ἐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεϑαι, and is never in any "wiſe, upon any account, ſubject to any change "or alteration whatſoever? To which he anſwers, "That it is neceſſary that he ſhould be the ſame "and always alike." And lib. 2. de Repub. where he lays down the fundamental laws and conſtitutions of religion, he mentions theſe two, (which one would almoſt think, he borrowed from St. James, but that he lived ſo long before him) viz. firſt, "That GOD is the cauſe of all good, and in no wiſe "of any evil:" anſwerably to what our apoſtle here aſſerts, that "GOD cannot be tempted with "evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that "every good and perfect gift is from him." Secondly, "That GOD doth not deceive us, by mak-"ing various repreſentations of himſelf to us; "ſometimes in one form, and ſometimes in ano-"ther; for he is unchangeable, and always the ſame "and cannot, τῆς ἑαυτὸ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, paſs out "of his own idea, or be any other than what he is:" which he further confirms by this excellent reaſoning, "that which is the beſt and moſt perfect be-"ing is not liable to any alteration; but ſuch a be-"ing is GOD, and therefore he cannot be changed "by any thing that is weaker and leſs perfect than

"him-

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" himſelf, and he cannot will to change himſelf; " for if he ſhould, it muſt either be for the better, " or for the worſe: it cannot be for the better; for " being already poſſeſt of all perfection, there can " be no acceſſion of any to him by any change; " and certainly there is no wiſe being, as GOD is, " that will change for the worſe; and therefore he " concludes, καλλίστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν μένει ἀεὶ ἁπλῶς καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ μορφῇ, " That being " the goodlieſt and beſt being that is poſſible, he " always continues ſimply the ſame." Seneca likewiſe, ſpeaking of the immutability of GOD's counſels, (l. vi. de Benef.) *ſtatuerunt* (ſays he) *quæ non mutarent, neque unquam primi conſilii deos pœnitet*, " The gods make ſuch unchangeable decrees, and " never repent them of their firſt counſel."

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures, which tell us, that GOD is unchangeable in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purpoſes, and promiſes: in his eſſence and being, Exod. iii. 14. " I am that I am;" this is his name, whereby he made known himſelf to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the Egyptians their oppreſſors: Pſal. xc. 2. " From everlaſting to everlaſting thou " art GOD." Pſal. cii. 27. " Thou art the ſame, " and thy years fail not." Mal. iii. 6. " I am the " LORD, and change not." Hence it is that the title of the living GOD is ſo frequently attributed to him; and he ſwears by this, as denoting not only his eternity, but his unchangeableneſs; " as I live, " ſaith the LORD." Hither likewiſe we may refer thoſe texts where he is called the " incorruptible GOD," Rom. i. 23. " The immortal King," 1 Tim. i. 17. and is ſaid " only to have immortali-

" ty,"

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" ty," 1 Tim. i. 16. And he is immutable likewiſe in his perfections; hence it is ſo often ſaid in the Pſalms, that " his goodneſs and his mercy endure " for ever; his righteouſneſs is likewiſe ſaid to en- " dure for ever." Pſal. cxi. 3. and Pſal. xxxvi. 6. " To be like the great mountains, not only viſible " and conſpicuous, but firm and immoveable;" and the ſame likewiſe is ſaid of his truth and faithfulneſs, Pſal. cxvii. 2. " His truth endureth for " ever;" and of his power, Eſa. xxvi. 4. " In the " LORD Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength."

And ſo likewiſe in his decrees and purpoſes, Pſal. xxxiii. 11. " The counſel of the LORD ſtandeth for " ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all genera- " tions;" Eſa. xiv. 24. " Surely as I have thought, " ſo ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have purpoſed, " ſo ſhall it ſtand." Numb. xxiii. 19. " GOD is not " a man that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, " that he ſhould repent: hath he ſpoken, and ſhall " not he do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he " bring it to paſs?" If he hath made any promiſe, or entred into any covenant with us, it is firm and immutable, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. " He will not ſuffer " his faithfulneſs to fail, his covenant will he not " break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his " lips." His covenant and his promiſe are in themſelves immutable; but for our further aſſurance, GOD hath given us his oath, the higheſt ſign of immutability; ſo the apoſtle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. vi. 18. " That by two immutable things," (viz. his promiſe and his oath) " in which it is im- " poſſible for GOD to lie, we might have ſtrong " conſolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope " which is ſet before us." I proceed to the

III. Thing I promiſed, which is, to anſwer an objection,

objection, which may ſeem to lie againſt what hath been ſaid, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of GOD's repenting himſelf; as Gen. vi. 6. where it is ſaid that "it repented GOD that he had "made man." 1 Sam. xv. 11. That "he repented that he had made Saul king;" and 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. When "the angel had ſtretched out his "hand over Jeruſalem to deſtroy it," it is ſaid, that "the LORD repented him of the evil." and Pſal. cxxxv. 14. the LORD ſaith there, that "he will re-"pent himſelf concerning his ſervants."

To all which I anſwer, that this expreſſion of GOD's repentance we are to underſtand (as many others in ſcripture) after the manner of men, and as ſpoken by way of condeſcention and accommodation to our weakneſs and capacity, and not as caſting any imputation of mutability and inconſtancy upon GOD; as if out of levity, or for want of foreſight, he did alter his mind: but when GOD is ſaid "to repent that he made man, or that he made "Saul king," the change was not in him, but them; and it ſignifies, not that GOD was abſolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reaſonable expectation; and therefore the ſcripture clothes GOD with the human paſſion of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as men uſe to do when they are greatly diſappointed and fall ſhort of their expectation.

And as for the other inſtances, wherein GOD is ſaid "to repent him of the evils threatned," the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that GOD doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his peremptory purpoſe and reſolution; that is, he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatning ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome tacit condition implied

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implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the conſtancy and immutability of GOD: for when GOD did threaten, he ſpake what he did really purpoſe and intend, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatned, upon which he was reſolved at that time when he threatned, to be taken off, and to ſtay his hand: and in thus doing, GOD doth not *mutare conſilium ſed ſententiam*; "he doth "not change his inward counſel and purpoſe, but "takes off the ſentence," which was paſt with reſerved conditions, and unknown to us, on purpoſe to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that GOD uſually reſerves ſuch conditions, not only in his threatnings, but ſometimes alſo in his promiſes, appears from that remarkable text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. "At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak "concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, "to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy "it; if that nation, againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil "that I thought to do unto them: at what inſtant "I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning "a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil "in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then I "will repent of the good wherewith I ſaid I would "benefit them." And from this very conſideration, the ſame prophet encourageth the people to repentance, Jer. xxvi. 13. "Therefore now amend "your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice "of the LORD your GOD, and the LORD will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced againſt "you." And we have a famous inſtance of this in the caſe of Nineveh, the deſtruction whereof within forty days after, GOD had openly proclaimed by his prophet

prophet; yet he ſtops the execution of the ſentence, upon their repentance, Jonah iii. 10. "The men of "Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the LORD "repented of the evil he ſaid he would do unto "them, and he did it not."

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the immutability of the divine nature to our ſelves; and the conſideration of it may ſerve to ſeveral good purpoſes, both in reference to bad and good men.

Firſt, in regard to ſinners and wicked men.

And, 1ſt, The unchangeableneſs of GOD is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the ſinner conſider what GOD is, and the conſideration of his unchangeable nature muſt needs terrify him: "He "is a holy GOD, and of purer eyes than to behold "iniquity," Hab. i. 12. He is not a GOD, that "hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell "with him: the fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in his ſight, "he hateth all the workers of iniquity," Pſal. v. 4,5. "He is likewiſe a juſt GOD, and will by no means "clear the guilty, nor let ſin go unpuniſht," Exod. xxxiv. 7. He is alſo omnipotent, and is able to execute the vengeance threatned againſt ſinners. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Pſal. xc. 11. "Thou even thou art to be feared; and who "may ſtand in thy ſight when once thou art an-"gry?" Pſal. lxxvi. 7. "Strong is the LORD "GOD who judgeth," Rev. xviii. 8. And, which gives a ſad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and juſt, and powerful, continues for ever the ſame, and will never alter or put off any of theſe properties, will never ceaſe to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent ſinners: and is it not a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of" this holy, and juſt, and omnipotent "GOD who

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" lives for ever," and can " puniſh for ever?" Let all obſtinate ſinners hear this, and tremble: you cannot be more obſtinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than GOD is peremptorily reſolved to make you miſerable. If you be determined upon a ſinful courſe; GOD is alſo determined how he will deal with you, that " he will not ſpare", but " that his " anger and jealouſy ſhall make againſt you," and that " all the curſes that are written in his book ſhall " light upon you," and that " he will blot out your " name from under heaven; he hath ſworn in his " wrath, that" unbelieving and impenitent ſinners " ſhall not enter into his reſt;" and for the greater aſſurance of the thing, and that we may not think, that there is any condition implied in theſe threatnings, he hath confirmed them by an oath, that by this immutable ſign, " in which it is impoſſible for " GOD to lie," ſinners might have ſtrong terrors, and not be able to fly to any in hopes of refuge.

2dly, The conſideration of GOD's unchangeableneſs, ſhould likewiſe be a very powerful argument to urge ſinners to repentance. If they will but leave their ſins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them upon their repentance and ſubmiſſion; for " he is a GOD gracious and merciful, ſlow to " anger, and ready to forgive;" he is " unchangea- " bly good," and " his mercy endureth for ever:" but if they will not come in, and ſubmit to theſe terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and deſtruction; nothing then " remains but a fearful look- " ing for of judgment, and fiery indignation to con- " ſume them." GOD hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace, and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant: there

there is a perfect and eternal oppoſition between the holy nature of GOD, and an impenitent ſinner; and 'tis impoſſible ſuch an one ſhould be happy, till this oppoſition be removed; and to do that, there are but two ways imaginable, by changing GOD, or by changing our ſelves. The nature of GOD is fixed and unalterable; GOD cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore we muſt depart from our ſinful and corrupt nature. GOD cannot quit his holineſs; therefore we muſt leave our ſins: we can have no hope to change GOD, therefore we muſt change our ſelves. Rectify, ſinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy luſts; do not venture upon impoſſibilities; rather think of altering thy ſinful nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, which is eſſentially immutable, "with "whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning." GOD hath once condeſcended ſo far, as "to take "our nature upon him," to make us capable of happineſs: but if this will not do, he can go no lower, he will not, he cannot put off his own nature, to make us happy. SERM. CXXXIII.

Secondly, in reference to good men, the conſideration of GOD's unchangeableneſs is matter of great conſolation to them; in all the changes and viciſſitudes of the world; their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, "the rock of ages," as the expreſſion is in the prophet Iſaiah, xxvi. 4. it relies upon the unchangeable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of GOD, "all whoſe promiſes are yea, and amen," truth and certainty. All other ſupports and hopes may fail us; but "GOD will not ſuffer his faithful-"neſs to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor "alter the thing which is gone out of his lips," as the pſalmiſt aſſures us, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. Men may

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break their word, and be leſs than their promiſes; but "GOD is faithful, who hath promiſed to give "grace and glory, and to with-hold no good thing "from them that walk uprightly. He is not as "man, that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, "that he ſhould repent. Hath he ſpoken, and "ſhall he not do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not "he bring it to paſs?

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in GOD, it is uſually on the merciful ſide; as when he ſtops the execution of his threatnings, upon the repentance of a ſinful nation; as in that remarkable text which I mentioned before, Jer. xviii. 7, 8. "At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concern-"ing a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck "up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that "nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn "from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I "thought to do unto them:" and ſo likewiſe when his faithful people and ſervants are in great diſtreſs, and there is no viſible help and means of relief; in this caſe likewiſe GOD is ſaid to repent and to appear for their reſcue. Deut. xxxii. 36. "The LORD "ſhall judge his people, and repent himſelf for his "ſervants, when he ſeeth that their power is gone."

Thus we ſhould comfort our ſelves in the greateſt extremities, with the conſideration of the immutable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of GOD. The things of the world are mutable, and the men of the world; even thoſe things which ſeem moſt conſtant, as the heavens: and to be ſettled upon the ſureſt foundations, as the earth; yet theſe ſhall be changed: Pſal. cii. 25, 26, 27. "Of old haſt thou laid the founda-"tions of the earth, and the heavens are the work "of thy hands: they ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt

" endure; all of them ſhall wax old like a garment; " as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they " ſhall be changed: but thou art the ſame, and thy " years ſhall have no end." From whence the pſalmiſt infers this comfort to the church and people of GOD, v. 28. " The children of thy ſervants " ſhall continue, and their ſeed ſhall be eſtabliſht " before thee."

Nothing that is mutable can be a ſolid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconſtant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly truſt to; and therefore the apoſtle " chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to " truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living GOD." He only that lives for ever is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When GOD would comfort the Iſraelites in Egypt under their great oppreſſion, he bids Moſes only to declare to them his immutability, Exod. iii. 14. Say unto them, " I am that I am, hath ſent me unto " you." And this is the great comfort of Chriſtians, that he who is their SAVIOUR, and their hope, is " the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever: he " that was, and that is, and that is to come," in all durations the ſame.

We are continually changing, and are not the ſame we were; ſome of us were young, and now are old; once, perhaps, flouriſht in great proſperity, but now are poor and needy; were once ſtrong and healthful, but now ſickly and weak: it ſhould comfort us in all theſe changes, that " GOD is ſtill " the ſame," and he alone is inſtead of all other comforts and ſupports: when all other things fail, we may " rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the GOD of " our ſalvation." Youth, and health, and riches,

and

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and friends may forſake us; but GOD hath promiſed, that "he will never leave us nor forſake us;" that "he will not leave us when we are old, nor forſake "us, when our ſtrength faileth;" when "our "ſtrength fails," and "our heart fails," then is he "the ſtrength of our hearts," and our "portion for "ever;" and when our great change ſhall come, and the terrors of death ſhall take hold of us, we have ſtill the ſame comfort, "the LORD liveth, and "bleſſed be the GOD of our ſalvation."

In a word, the conſideration of GOD's immutability ſhould keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be ſtartled and ſurpriſed at them; according to that of the pſalmiſt, "he ſhall not be afraid of evil tidings, "becauſe his heart is fixed, truſting in GOD." This ſhould make us conſtant to him and his truth, "ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, and always abounding "in the work of the LORD, for as much as we "know, that our labour ſhall not be in vain in the "LORD;" it ſhould make us "hold faſt the pro-"feſſion of our faith without wavering," in full aſſurance, that GOD "will be as good to us as his "word," and in a firm hope and perſuaſion "of "that eternal life, which GOD that cannot lie hath "promiſed."

SER-

SERMON CXXXIV.

The knowledge of GOD.

1 SAM. ii. 3.

The LORD *is a* GOD *of knowledge.*

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I Come now to ſpeak of thoſe properties and perfections which relate to the divine underſtanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. Knowledge conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves; wiſdom conſiders the reſpects and relation of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The knowledge of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their powers, and qualities, and circumſtances; the wiſdom of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relation of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition; of their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. The knowledge of GOD only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his wiſdom implies the ſkill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, to make every thing, and to govern and adminiſter all things in number, weight, and meaſure. I ſhall at preſent ſpeak of the firſt of theſe, the knowledge of GOD; which, as I ſaid, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature: of the powers, and qualities, and circumſtances of things.

Theſe words ſignify GOD to be the fountain of knowledge; that is, that he poſſeſſeth it himſelf, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I ſhall

Firſt,

Firſt, endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to GOD.

Secondly, ſhew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine knowledge.

Thirdly, draw ſome practical inferences from the whole.

Firſt, for the proof of it, I ſhall attempt it two ways.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.

2. From ſcripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon. I begin with this firſt; becauſe, unleſs this be eſtabliſhed, all divine revelation falls to the ground; unleſs natural reaſon aſſures us, that GOD is endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requiſite on the part of the revealer, ability and integrity; that he have a perfect knowledge and underſtanding of the thing which he reveals, ſo that he cannot be deceived himſelf; and ſo much goodneſs and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now unleſs our reaſon aſſure us that GOD is endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, the firſt condition is evidently wanting, viz. ability, and conſequently the ſecond, integrity; for there cannot be goodneſs and veracity without knowledge.

This being premiſed, I proceed to the proof of it from ſuch arguments as our natural reaſon ſuggeſts to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine perfections are not to be proved by way of demonſtration, but by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdities and inconveniencies of the contrary; for if we deny knowledge to GOD, we muſt deny it to be a perfection; we muſt deny it to be in any of the creatures; we muſt attribute many other imperfections

fections to GOD; all which are absurd to our natural reason; for natural reason dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to GOD will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature; now these are so many arguments which natural reason offers to us to prove, that "knowledge belongs "to GOD."

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to GOD. Natural reason tells us, though the scripture had not said it, that "knowledge excels ignorance as "much as light doth darkness;" now whatever is perfect and excellent is to be attributed to the divine nature; for this is the first notion we have of GOD, that he is "a being absolutely perfect."

2. Knowledge is to be found in some of the creatures, and therefore is much more in GOD the creator, because it is derived from him. Our very understandings whereby we know GOD, or any thing else, are an argument that knowledge and understanding are in GOD. If "he gives wisdom to the wise, and "knowledge to them that know understanding," if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himself is much more possest of it. The scripture indeed useth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reason doth suggest to the most brutish and ignorant of men. Psal. xciv. 8, 9, 10. "Un-"derstand, ye brutish among the people; and ye "fools, when will ye be wise? he that planted the "ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, "shall he not see?"

3. The denial of this perfection to GOD, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipse the divine nature, than to take away this perfection from it; this would bring

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an univerſal obſcurity upon GOD's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn "the brightneſs of the morning" into the "ſhadow of death." If we remove this perfection from GOD, we deny his wiſdom. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or ſuit one thing to another: and we weaken his power. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would power be without knowledge? what irregular things would it produce? what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power were let looſe to act without the conduct of knowledge and underſtanding? And, conſequently, we take away his providence; for without knowledge there can be no counſel, no fore-caſt of events, no proviſion for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all; for without knowledge there could be no ſuch thing as goodneſs; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind neceſſity. There could be no veracity, nor juſtice, nor mercy in GOD; for all theſe ſuppoſe knowledge. He that ſpeaks truth muſt know it; he that is juſt, muſt underſtand right from wrong; he that ſhews mercy, muſt know who are miſerable, and how they may be relieved; and not to labour in a thing ſo plain and eaſy: take away the knowldge of GOD, and you render him incapable of any honour from his creatures; for if we know not what honour we do him, it is loſt labour to give him any. And that we may ſee theſe are the deductions of natural reaſon, without the advantage of revelation, we ſhall find the heathens, who were deſtitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to GOD. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to ſay, *Deos omnia*

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cernere; and we know the heathens were wont to swear, *Diis immortalibus teſtibus interpoſitis*, which is an owning of his omniſcience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum*, de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

2. From ſcripture and divine revelation. I will not heap up all thoſe teſtimonies of ſcripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only inſtance in two or three: Job xxxvi. 4. "He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee;" xxxvii. 16. "Doſt thou know the wondrous works "of him who is perfect in knowledge?"

Hither we may refer thoſe texts which repreſent GOD by way of condeſcenſion to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which ſignify his knowledge of what is done in the world; and thoſe which ſpeak of him as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; "he giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, "and underſtanding to them that know underſtand-"ing," Dan. ii. 21. And thoſe which ſpeak of GOD, as knowing the moſt ſecret things, "the hid-"den things of darkneſs," the hearts and the thoughts of men; and thoſe things which are at the greateſt diſtance, as future things; and of the greateſt uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of theſe I ſhall particularly conſider; for in proving that GOD knows all theſe, his knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the divine underſtanding, it muſt in all probability be either thoſe things which are ſecret and hidden, as men's ſecret actions, or their thoughts; or elſe thoſe things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cauſe, as future contingencies; and the proving of this may

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be of great use to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

1. Of these, viz. That GOD takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even those that are most secret. And in the handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these three things.

1. That GOD takes knowledge of all our actions; "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth "all his goings," Job xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious observer of them; "he "seeth all his goings, he marks all his steps," takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; "there is no darkness nor "shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity "may hide themselves," Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That GOD takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two testimonies to this purpose. Tully lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for society: *sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat deos intueri.* Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to say, πάντα θεὸς εἰδέναι τὰ τε λεγόμενα καὶ πρατ]όμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βαλλόμενα. Arrian, in his discourse upon Epictetus, tells us, it is necessary that every one should be persuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πρατ]ομένων ἐφορᾶται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, "that "every thing that is done by men is seen of GOD."

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The scripture frequently mentions this, Psal. cxxxix. 1, &c. Prov. v. 21. "The ways of man "are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponder- "eth all his goings." Jer. xxxii. 19. "Thine eyes "are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to "give every one according to his ways, and according "to the fruit of his doings."

2. He is a curious observer, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. Job saith, "he seeth all "our steps;" and Solomon, that "he pondereth "all our goings;" the word is, "he weighs them "in a balance." So 1 Sam. ii. 3. "The LORD is "a GOD of knowledge, by him actions are weigh- "ed." Job xxxi. 4. "Doth he not see my ways, "and count all my steps?" which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactness of GOD's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumstances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them; whatever may commend an action, or blemish it; whatever may aggravate a sin, or excuse it. Isa. xxvi. 7. "Thou most upright doth weigh the path of the "just." There's not a good word that we speak, but GOD hears it, Mal. iii. 16. "And the LORD "hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance "was written before him;" and all we do is "not- "ed in his book, Psal. lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we "do our alms in secret," when we "enter into "our closets and shut the doors, our father seeth "in secret," Mat. vi. Nor can we retire our selves to any place, where we can sin so as GOD shall not see us, where we can hide our sins from his sight, or our selves from his wrath. Hear how sensibly a heathen

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heathen speaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκότος ἔνδον ποιήσητε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι εἰσὶ· οὐ γὰρ ἔστε, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, τίς τούτοις χρεία φωτὸς, εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε; Arrian in Ep. l. 1. c. 14.

The scripture is full of testimonies to this purpose, Psal. xc. 8. "Thou hast set our iniquities before "thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy coun- "tenance;" those sins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge, "darkness and light are all one to him;" Psal. cxxxix. 11, 12. Jer. xvi. 17, 23, 24. "Can any hide him- "self in secret places, that I shall not see him?"

II. GOD knows the hearts and thoughts of men, which implies these two things.

1st. His perfect knowledge of them.

2dly. That this is his peculiar prerogative.

1st. GOD perfectly knows the hearts of men, Jer. xvii. 10. "I the LORD search the heart, and try "the reins;" where by heart and reins, which are the most inward parts of the body, and lie least open to discovery, are signified the most secret thoughts and motions of the soul; these GOD is said to search and try, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to signify to us the perfection and exactness of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they search into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; so GOD is said "to "search the heart," to signify to us that he knows the hearts of men, as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the strictest search and most diligent examination; upon the same account he is said elsewhere in scripture "to weigh the spirits of men," Prov. xvi. 2. "All

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2. "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, "but the LORD weigheth the spirits;" that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the secret motions and inclinations of mens hearts, as men have of those things which they weigh in a balance with the greatest exactness.

Now that GOD hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the scripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, 1 Kings viii. 39. "For thou, even thou, knowest the hearts of all the "children of men." 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "The LORD "searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the ima-"ginations of the thoughts." How close and reserved soever men may be, what disguise soever they may use to hide their purposes from men, yet GOD sees them; the things which are most dark and secret are open to his view, Psal. xliv. 21. "He "knoweth the secrets of the hearts," Prov. xv. 11. "Hell and destruction are before him, how much "more the hearts of the children of men?" Whatever pretences men may make, GOD sees through them, and discovers the very intentions of their hearts. Psal. vii. 9. The righteous LORD trieth the heart and reins." Heb. iv. 13. It is said there of "the word of GOD," that it is "a discerner of the "thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all "things are naked and open to the eye of him with "whom we have to do, and there is no creature "that is not manifest in his sight;" nay he knows our thoughts at a distance, what they will be, before any actually are, Psal. cxxxix. 2. "Thou knowest "my thoughts afar off." 'Tis true indeed every man is conscious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are present, and when they are past, if he have not forgot them; but

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but no man knows what he shall think to morrow, but this GOD knows, for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do our selves; "GOD is greater than our hearts, and knows all "things," 1 John iii. 20.

And though the scripture had not revealed this so plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of GOD; the reason of our minds tells us, that GOD knows our hearts; and the fears and jealousies of our minds are an evidence of it.

(1st.) The reason of every man's mind tells him, that the supreme being, whom we call GOD, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that "he excels in knowledge;" and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend it self to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of GOD in respect of all objects, is like the sun in respect of this lower world, "nothing is hid from the light of it." We have naturally this apprehension of GOD, that he is an immense being, every where present, that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and consequently that he is present to our spirits, and sees all the motions of our minds, and discerns the very secrets of our hearts; and there can be no such thing as secrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that these are the dictates of natural reason, without the help and assistance of divine revelation, we shall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were firmly possest with this apprehension, that GOD knows the hearts of men. This may be sufficiently collected from

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from the frequent sayings of the wiser heathens to this purpose; that the best and most acceptable worship of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this sense Tully speaks, *cultus autem deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus pleniſſimusque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ, atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*; "The best and holiest worship of the gods "is to worship them with a pure, and upright, and "sincere mind." To the same purpose is that known saying of the poet,

Compositum jus fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, & incoctum generoso pectus honesto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre litabo.

"do but offer to GOD a mind inwardly resolved to "be just and honest, and the plainest sacrifice "will please him." Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honest disposition of mind, to be most acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did most firmly believe that GOD knows the secrets of mens hearts; otherwise there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themselves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by consequence, there are many express passages in their writings, which do sufficiently signify their belief of this principle. Thales, one of their most ancient philosophers, being asked, "if an unjust man could conceal himself from "GOD?" he answered, "he cannot so much as hide "from him the very thoughts and design of it." Socrates (as Xenophon tells us) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his scholars, that "the gods "know all things, what we say, and what we do,

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" and what we think in silence." To the same purpose Arrian in his dissertations upon Epictetus, laying down the principles of a virtuous life, " first of all, saith he, " we must learn this, that there is a GOD who takes " care of the world, and that there is nothing hid " from him, not only what we do, but not so much " as what we think and design." So likewise Tully in his book of laws, " let every man be firmly " persuaded of this, that the gods see what every " man is, and with what mind and devotion they " serve them:" I will add but one testimony more, and that is of Seneca in his epistles, *nihil Deo clausum est, intereſt animis nostris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit*, " we can keep nothing close from " GOD, for he is present to our minds, and intimate " to our thoughts;" so that you see this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reason themselves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewise a secret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and such as happen upon surprize and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate sense of our minds, and do more truly discover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate discourse. If I see a man upon the sudden sight of a serpent recoil and start back, though he tell me never so often that he is not afraid, yet I am sufficiently convinced of the contrary, because I see in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of fear and danger; so if men find that upon the designing of a secret wickedness, which never went further than their own hearts, their consciences do sting and lash them, that they have a sense of guilt, and feel inward frights and

and horrors, whatever they may say to the contrary; this is a natural acknowledgment of an invisible eye that sees them, and disallows their wicked designs. If that be true which the heathen poet says, that

Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.

" He that meditates any secret wickedness in his " heart, is guilty to himself, as if he had commit- " ted it; this is a plain confession, that the man stands in awe of something besides himself, and is jealous that there is one that is conscious to what he thinks.

2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of GOD. This is implied in the answer to that question, " who can know the heart of man? Jer. xvii. 10. " I the LORD search the heart, and try the " reins;" this is the prerogative of GOD, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, a knower of the heart, 1 Kings viii. 39. " Thou, even thou only " knowest the hearts of all the children of men." Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and designs of others, from their words and actions; but GOD only knows them. Men are conscious to their own thoughts and purposes; " the spirit of a " man that is in him, knows the things of a man;" but they cannot see into the secrets of another man's mind; 'tis GOD alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the secret and inward workings of it are not subject to the cognizance of any but GOD alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. " The LORD seeth " not as man seeth; for man looketh on the out-

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" ward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the " heart;" our knowledge is but superficial, and glides upon the outside and surface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkest place, the most inward retirement, the privatest closet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this GOD only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & speculator omnium, à quo nihil secretum esse potest, tenebris interest, interest & cogitationibus nostris quasi alteris tenebris*, saith Min. Fœlix, " GOD made all things, and sees all " things, and therefore nothing can be secret from " him; he is present in darkness, and he is present " to the thoughts of men, which are as it were " another and a thicker darkness."

The devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's heart better than GOD himself; and that notwithstanding the testimony which GOD gave of his integrity, yet if he were but soundly tried by affliction, he would renounce GOD, and curse him to his face: but the event proved how groundless and malicious this suggestion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the passages of some divines concerning the devil's immediate access to the minds of men, and his power to cast wicked thoughts into them; which seems by consequence to grant him some knowledge of mens hearts; for by the same reason that he can imprint thoughts upon men's minds, he may see those that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very sagacious spirit, and can make very shrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of men's minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and ob-

ſervation of our tempers and paſſions, of our intereſts and deſigns, and from the general tenor of our actions in publick and private, and from our prayers and confeſſions to GOD (if he permit him at any time to be ſo near good men) I think there is no doubt: but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and ſuch as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the buſineſs of caſting blaſphemous and deſpairing thoughts into the minds of men, to this I would ſay theſe three things.

1. That there are few of theſe caſes which may not more probably be reſolved into the wickedneſs and infidelity of men's hearts, or into the darkneſs and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raiſe and ſuggeſt ſtrange thoughts to men, and ſuch as we may be apt to think have no riſe from our ſelves, not conſidering what an odd and ſtrange influence the diſorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we ſee in violent fevers, and ſeveral other diſeaſes; and melancholy, though the workings of it are more ſtill and quiet, is as truly a diſeaſe as any other; ſo that I chuſe rather to aſcribe as much of theſe to a bodily diſtemper as may be, becauſe it is a very uncomfortable conſideration, to think that the devil hath ſuch an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not ſee how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of GOD, which the ſcripture plainly gives him, of being "the "only knower of the heart," that the devil can have ſo immediate an acceſs to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is ſaid, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. that "Satan pro-"voked David to number the people," and Luke xxii. 3.

xxii. 3. That "the devil entred into Judas," and Acts v. 3. That "Satan had filled the heart of A-"nanias to lie unto the Holy Ghoſt," and Eph. ii. 2. That "the devil is the ſpirit that worketh in the "children of diſobedience:" I ſay, I cannot think that any, or all of theſe expreſſions do amount to ſuch an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into men's minds; but they only ſignify, that the devil hath a greater hand in ſome ſins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, give him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully, by preſenting the occaſions of ſuch wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is uſual, in ſcripture-phraſe, as to aſcribe all good motions to GOD's ſpirit, ſo all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cauſe of them, but becauſe he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I ſee no reaſon to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the ſecret thoughts of men's minds; for this ſeems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of men's hearts, and to give him a key to that cloſet which GOD hath reſerved to himſelf: for it is a very nice diſtinction which is here made between the thoughts of men's minds, and the images of their fancies; and if theſe ſhould happen to be but words that ſignify the ſame thing, we ſhall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of GOD. Therefore becauſe the ſcripture is a ſtranger to theſe nice and ſubtile diſtinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much ſafer to aſſert the prerogative of GOD in that latitude that the

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ſcripture uſeth the word heart; for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our ſouls are totally exempt from the immediate cognizance of any other ſpirit but GOD's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of men's tempers and habits and deſigns, and the courſe of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Particular; GOD's knowledge of future events. This GOD purpoſes as the way to diſcern the true GOD from idols, Iſaiah xli. 21, &c. "Produce "your cauſe, ſaith the LORD, bring forth your "ſtrong reaſons, ſaith the king of Jacob;" that is, let them bring ſome argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he inſtanceth in foretelling future events, ver. 22. "Let them ſhew the former "things, what they be, that we may conſider them, "and know the latter end of them; or declare us "things for to come. Shew the things that are to "come hereafter, that we may know that ye are "gods." GOD puts it upon this iſſue, if they can "foretel future things," then they are gods; if not; they are "vanity, and a work of naught, and "he is an abomination that chuſeth them," ver. 24. By "things to come," I underſtand ſuch effects as do not depend upon any neceſſary cauſe, but upon the will of free agents, and ſo may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of GOD, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I ſhall conſider theſe two things.

1. That GOD knows future events.

2. That

2. That he only knows them.

1. GOD knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from scripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the best part of wisdom; and unless this did belong to GOD, how could he govern the world? The heathens, except only the Epicureans, generally granted this, as appears in those wise counsels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpose, that we should not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to GOD, who only knows them and disposeth them.

Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris. Juv.

And afterward, saith he, "We are importunate "with GOD for wife and children:" *At illis notum, qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor.* And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from those apprehensions which they had of divination. Tully lays down this for a principle, *deos posse nobis signa futurarum rerum ostendere*; de legibus. And in his book de Divin. he tells us, "that there was such "a thing as divination, for it was an old opinion," *jam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque Pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata consensu*, and afterward, that this divination was not, *sine instinctu afflatúque divino.*

I know they did variously explain this, according to their several opinions about fate and contingency, and their apprehensions about the providence of GOD. One sect of them, the Stoicks, held that there was a fatal chain of causes from first to last, and things did necessarily follow one another; and by this means they

they made fore-knowledge easy and explicable; and though in their disputes they seem to grant no such things as events and contingencies, yet they are agreed in the thing, that those things which we call events, though they would not call them so, were fore-known to GOD. And for this I shall only cite one testimony of Seneca, speaking of GOD's fore-knowledge of the most contingent things, the dispositions of men long before they are born; he adds, *nota est enim illis operis sui series, omniúmque illis rerum per manus suas iturarum scientia in aperto semper est; nobis ex abdito subit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis provisa veniunt & familiaria*; and how peremptory soever this sect is in their disputes about fate, yet when they speak of the τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, and generally in their moral discourses, they seem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal necessity. SERM. CXXXIV.

And those other sects of the philosophers that denied fate, did generally grant "GOD's fore-know-"ledge of contingent things." I grant indeed, that they did rather make GOD's fore-knowledge an arbitrary and voluntary, than a necessary perfection, that is, that GOD, when he pleased to apply himself to it, could fore-know all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to small and inconsiderable things, so neither his fore-knowledge. But Tully seems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the least things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot say he is constant to himself: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleased to trouble him-

himself with it; and had they not in this mistaken the nature of GOD, they might easily have apprehended, that it is no trouble nor weariness to an infinite understanding, that is always in act, to know the least things how many soever they be.

2. From scripture, which gives us testimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Testimonies, Isa. xlviii. 3, &c. Acts xv. 18. "Known unto GOD are all his works, from the "beginning of the world, ἀπ' αἰῶνος from everlast-"ing:" which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of Seneca. *Nota enim illis operis sui series*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from scripture. I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened, Gen. xv. 13. GOD foretels the children of Israel's deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accomplished, Exod. xii. 40, 41. The prophet that propheſied against the altar at Bethel named the man that should do it, Josias, 350 years before-hand, 1 Kings xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of Israel from the Babylonish captivity was foretold 100 years before to be done particularly by Cyrus; which is so strange, that the prophet brings it in with a preface of GOD's wisdom and power, Isa. xliv. 24, &c. Which was afterward precisely fulfilled, when the 70 years were expired. How are the life and death of the Messias, with many particular circumstances foretold! And did not he foretel the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years before?

But because there may be no contingency in good things, GOD himself may be resolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you shall find that the worst things have been

told; the Apostacy of the children of Israel, Deut. xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the gospel, Isa. liii. 1, 5, 9, 26. Our SAVIOUR foretold the treachery of Judas and Peter's denial of him: now these are so evil, that it were blasphemy to suppose the holy GOD to have any hand in them; and therefore are foretold by him merely by virtue of his fore-knowledge, and the infiniteness of his understanding, which reacheth things at the greatest distance, that are most contingent. SERM. CXXXIV.

SERMON CXXXV.

Of the knowledge of GOD.

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1 SAM. ii. 3.

The LORD *is a* GOD *of knowledge.*

I Have considered this perfection of GOD, in some of the greatest and most difficult instances of it, his knowledge of the most secret things, the hearts of men, and future events; against the last of which there are some objections, which I come now briefly to consider, and pass on to what remains. SERM. CXXXV.

Objection the first; the impossibility of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true: but future events, which may, or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will, or will not be, because they have no

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certain cause; therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Answer, This I confess is the grand difficulty; I shall not be so solicitous to take it away, as to give satisfaction to it.

1. I might say, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the cause, but of the object, which may be certain, though the cause be contingent. Which I prove thus; whatever event hath actually happened, as because now it is past, it is certainly true, that it was; so because it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that it would be; as in Peter's denying of CHRIST. If it be now true, that he hath denied him, it was true before, that he would deny him; and it being determinately true, GOD saw it as it was; so that here is an object of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the possibility of GOD's knowing future contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that GOD doth know them. I will give but one instance for the proof of this. Nothing more evident than the sin of Adam; yet GOD fore-knew this, how else was CHRIST "decreed before the foundation of the "world?" CHRIST was a remedy upon the occasion of sin; now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was fore-seen: and this being certain, *cum constat de re, frustra inquiritur de modo*, "when "we are certain of the thing, 'tis not necessary to "know the manner." We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the soul and body, though no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the

the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀ-φάν]ασα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best reason and understanding can give nō account. SERM. CXXXV.

3. 'Tis very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and measures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we should be like GOD in knowledge, our understandings would be infinite like his; and in this case especially it becomes us to put on the modesty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant spirits take it for an affront to their understandings, that any one should expect they should believe any thing, though they have the highest assurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny GOD's knowledge of future events, unless they may be satisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are those who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some say, that GOD sees future events *in speculo voluntatis*; others say, that the eternity of GOD is actually commensurate to all duration, as his immensity to all space, and so GOD doth not so properly fore-see and fore-know, as see and know future things by the presentiality and co-existence of all things in all eternity; for they say, that

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that future things are actually present and existing to GOD, though not in *mensurâ propriâ*, yet in *mensurâ alienâ:* the school-men have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the understanding these phrases; but to me they seem to signify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever since, lest they should seem to be ignorant, would seem to understand; but I wonder most, that men, when they have amused and puzzled themselves and others with hard words, should call this explaining things.

The sum of the answer is this; that when we have done all we can, GOD's fore-knowledge of future events may seem contradictious and impossible to us, much less do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have sufficient assurance of the thing, and unless we had infinite understandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, that if we can admit such a knowledge in GOD as seems contradictious and impossible to our reason, why may we not allow and frame such notions of his goodness and justice?

To this I answer, there is a great difference between those perfections of GOD which are imitable, and those which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like GOD; and if we are assured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not necessary that we should know the manner of it, and disentangle it from contradiction and impossibility: but it is otherwise in GOD's goodness and justice, which are imitable: he that imitates, endeavours to be like something that he knows, and we must have a clear idea and notion

notion of that which we would bring ourſelves to the likeneſs of; theſe perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of theſe perfections is chiefly recommended to us in ſcripture, Jer. ix. 24. By theſe God reveals himſelf, and declares his name, and makes himſelf known to us, even by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4, 5. When God would give a deſcription of himſelf to Moſes, he promiſes "to "cauſe his goodneſs to paſs before him." So that it doth not follow, that becauſe God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithſtanding the ſeeming contradiction and impoſſibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's juſtice or goodneſs that ſeems contradictious or impoſſible. The

Third objection is made up of ſeveral inconveniencies that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly fore-ſees we will do; for otherwiſe his knowledge would be fallible.

Anſwer, God's fore-knowledge lays no neceſſity upon the event: in every event, we may conſider the effect in itſelf, or with relation to the cauſe, and the manner how it comes to paſs; conſidered in itſelf, it is future, with relation to it's cauſes, it is contingent. God ſees it as both, and ſo, as that which until it is, may be, or not be; and when it comes to paſs, he ſees the man do it freely; and ſo before it be done, it hath no neceſſity; but upon ſuppoſition of fore-ſight; as when it is, it hath upon ſuppoſition

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position that it is, as Origen excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not the cause of the things that are fore-known; but because the thing is future and shall be, this is the reason why it is fore-known; for it doth not, because it was known, come to pass; but because it was to come to pass, therefore it was fore-known; and bare knowledge is no more the cause of any event, which because it is known must infallibly be, than my seeing a man run, is the cause of his running, which, because I do see, is infallibly so.

2dly. If GOD infallibly fore-knows what men will do, how can he be serious in his exhortations to repentance, in his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Answer. All these are founded in the liberty of our actions. GOD exhorts to repentance and expects it, because, by his grace, we may do it: he is said to grieve for our impenitency, because we may do otherwise, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themselves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obstinacy and hardness, they may be rendred vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lies upon serious, and you ask how GOD can exhort men seriously to that which he fore-sees that they will not do; those whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent? I answer, if his exhortations were not serious, he could not fore-see the final impenitency of men. To fore-see men's final impenitency, is to fore-see their wilful contempt of GOD's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace: now mens wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be fore-seen, unless GOD fore-see that his exhortations are serious, and in good earnest.

Having

Having answered the objections against GOD's fore-knowing future events, I proceed to shew,

II. That GOD only knows future events. Isa. xliv. 6, 7. "Thus saith the LORD the king of Israel, and "his redeemer the LORD of hosts, I am the first, "and I am the last, and besides me there is no GOD: "and who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, "and set it in order for me, since I appointed the "ancient people? and the things that are coming, "and shall come? let them shew unto them." Isa. xlvi. 9, 10. "Remember the former things of old, "for I am GOD, and there is none else; I am GOD "and there is none like me. Declaring the end from "the beginning, and from ancient times the things "that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall "stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

The reason is evident, because the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially if we grant it to be beyond our finite understanding, to explain the possibility of such a knowledge; for, to be sure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any understanding.

But it may here be objected; did not the oracles among the heathens foretel several things, which Christians are satisfied came from the devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of heathen oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a spirit; yet the darkness and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is such, as shews that the devil was conscious to himself of the uncertainty of his knowledge in those matters: and those few that came to pass, and are in

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any tolerable ſenſe ſaid to be accompliſhed, were in ſuch matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the devil to be a ſagacious ſpirit;) or elſe in disjunctive caſes, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it muſt either be ſo, or ſo, in which a bold gueſſing may often hit right: but gueſſing at future things, is far from a knowledge of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumſtances of time and perſon, ſuch as we find in ſcripture in many inſtances, to the prediction of which, the greateſt ſagacity, and the utmoſt gueſſing could do nothing, ſuch as thoſe predictions of which I gave inſtances out of ſcripture.

I have now done with the firſt general head I propoſed to be ſpoken to from theſe words, viz. To prove that this attribute of knowledge belongs to GOD. I proceed to the

Second, viz. To conſider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I ſhall ſpeak to in theſe following particulars.

1. GOD's knowledge is preſent and actual, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act; it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we muſt take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of GOD is an actual and ſteady comprehenſion of things; he being every where preſent, and all eye, nothing can eſcape his ſight, but all the objects are at once in the view of the divine underſtanding. Heb. iv. 13. "Neither

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" is there any creature that is not manifeſt in his " ſight: but all things are naked and open unto the " eyes of him with whom we have to do." SERM. CXXXV.

2. GOD's knowledge is an intimate and thorough knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and eſſence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and ſuperficial; our knowledge glides upon the ſuperficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it ſeldom reacheth further than the ſkin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are repreſented to us with all their maſks and diſguiſes: but GOD knows things as they are. 1 Sam. xvi. 7. " The LORD ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man " looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD " looketh on the heart: GOD knows things throughout, all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of GOD penetrates into every thing, the light of the divine underſtanding lays all things " open and naked," Heb. iv. 13. In which expreſſion the apoſtle alludes to the ſacrifices of beaſts, which were flead, and cleft down the back bone, that the prieſt might look into them, and ſee whether they were without blemiſh. To the eye of our underſtandings moſt objects are cloſe, and have their ſkins upon them; but to the eyes of GOD all things are uncovered and diſſected, and lie open to his view.

3. GOD's knowledge is clear and diſtinct. Our underſtandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confuſion; we are often deceived with the near likeneſs and reſemblance of things, and miſtake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not ſufficiently ſeparate and

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distinguish things from one another; we see things many times together, and in an heap, and do but know them in gross: but there is no confusion in the divine understanding, that is a clear light which separates and distinguisheth things of the greatest nearness and resemblance; God hath a particular knowledge of the least things, Luke xii. 7. "even "the very hairs of your head are all numbred;" those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another; "the very "hairs of your head" are severally and distinctly known to God.

4. God's knowledge is certain and infallible. We are subject to doubt and error in our understanding of things; every thing almost imposeth upon our understandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwise than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our interest and advantage, our humours and distempers; these all misrepresent things, and darken our minds, and seduce our judgments, and betray us to error and mistake: but the divine understanding is a clear, fixed, constant, and undisturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no stain from affection, or interest, or any other thing. Men are many times confident and apt to impose upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the divine understanding, that it is secure from all possibility of error; it is God only "that cannot lie," Tit. i. 2. because he cannot be deceived; the infallibility of God is the foundation of his veracity.

5. The knowledge of God is easy, and without difficulty. We must dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain

attain the knowledge of things without ſearch and ſtudy, and great intention of mind; we ſtrive to comprehend ſome things, but they are ſo vaſt that we cannot: other things are at ſuch a diſtance, that our underſtanding is too weak to diſcern them; other things are ſo little, and ſmall, and nice, that our underſtanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to ſuch a point as to faſten upon them; but the underſtanding of GOD being infinite, there is nothing at a diſtance from it, nothing too great and vaſt for it's comprehenſion; nor is there any thing ſo little that it can eſcape his knowledge and animadverſion. The great wiſdom of Solomon is compared to "the ſand on the ſea-ſhore;" the ſhore is vaſt, but the ſands are little, (ſaith one) to ſignify that the vaſt mind of Solomon did comprehend the leaſt things. 'Tis much more true of GOD; his underſtanding is a vaſt comprehenſion of the leaſt things, as well as the greateſt; and all this GOD does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without ſtudy, and his underſtanding is in continual exerciſe without wearineſs. How many things are there which we cannot find out without ſearch, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to underſtand them? But all things are obvious to GOD, and lie open to his view.

He is ſaid indeed in ſcripture "to ſearch the heart" and "to try the reins" and "to weigh the ſpirits," but theſe expreſſions do not ſignify the painfulneſs, but the perfection of his knowledge; that he knows thoſe things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we uſe the greateſt diligence and exactneſs.

6. The knowledge of GOD is univerſal, and extends to all objects. We know but a few things,

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our ignorance is greater than our knowledge, *maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus:* but the divine underſtanding is vaſt and comprehenſive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; "he is greater than our hearts, and "knoweth all things;" he knows himſelf, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the ſecrets of his will, 1 Cor. ii. 11. "The ſpirit of "GOD ſearcheth the deep things of GOD;" he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of GOD is infinite; Pſal. cxlvii. 5. "His underſtanding is infinite:" he knows himſelf, and his own perfections, and all the poſſibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the underſtanding of GOD being infinite is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite underſtandings are liable to alterations; they may grow or decline: but the knowledge of GOD is a full, conſtant light, it is always the ſame, not liable to any eclipſe, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the ſame.

Thirdly, I come now to draw ſome inferences from the ſeveral parts of this diſcourſe.

I. From the perfection of GOD's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiſeth our admiration, and none more than knowledge: there is nothing that we value our ſelves or others more by, than this: the higheſt knowledge of man, the moſt glorious underſtanding, that ever any one of the ſons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of GOD, but as a glow-worm to the ſun." If we admire theſe "Candles of the LORD," which ſhine

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so imperfectly in the dark; if we reverence a little knowledge, compassed about with ignorance; how shall we admire "the Father of lights, in whom is "no darkness at all," that knowledge which hath nothing of blemish or imperfection in it!

We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him; "what have we that we have not received?" And as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine understanding. We are blind and ignorant; 'tis but a few things that we are capable of knowing; and we know but a few of those things which our natures are capable of knowing; and of those things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, 'tis slight and superficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confusion in the use of it; the clearest reason, and the brightest understanding of man hath many flaws and defects in it; so that the more we know of GOD, and of our selves, the more humble we shall be. It is "an empty knowledge, "and falsely so called" that "puffs up;" as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raise up themselves; but those which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads; so 'tis only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement. He knows our wants and weakness, and "will lay "no more upon us than we are able to bear; for "he considers that we are but dust;" he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleases," put a hook in their nose," and "his bri-"dle in their lips," as he did to Senacherib, 2 Kings xix. 28.

1. From

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1. From GOD's knowing our ſecret actions, I infer,

1. If GOD ſees our moſt ſecret actions, this diſcovers and confutes the ſecret atheiſm of many. He that commits the moſt ſecret ſin denies the omniſcience of GOD. Thus David deſcribes the atheiſm of ſome in his days: "he hath ſaid in his heart, GOD "hath forgot; he hideth his face, he will never ſee "it: the LORD ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall the GOD "of Jacob regard it." And is not this, in effect, to deny GOD's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a ſun, as deny that it ſhines and enlightens the world.

There are ſome relicks of this even in the beſt men, which do at ſome times diſcover themſelves, Pſal. lxxiii. 10, 11. "Therefore his people return "hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out "to them:" and they ſay, "how doth GOD know? "is there knowledge in the moſt High?" that is, the people of GOD come to this, when they are come to an afflicted ſtate, and ſee the proſperity of wicked men; they come to this, to queſtion the providence of GOD, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheiſm reigns in wicked men; while they live in their ſins, they live in the denial of GOD's omniſcience: for did men really believe that "GOD ſees in ſecret," that his eye perceiveth the darkneſs, and lays open and naked all things before it, how durſt they lie, and ſteal, and ſwear falſely? Vain man! why doſt thou ſeek darkneſs and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believeſt that GOD is every where? How canſt thou retire from him; how canſt thou ſhut him out? If thou believeſt that he is the light, what ſecurity is darkneſs to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greateſt

greateſt and beſt perſon in the world, who is thy ſovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy maſter, and thy beſt friend (for we uſe to reverence perſons under theſe notions and relations, and to be aſhamed to do any thing that is vile and unſeemly before them;) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not aſhamed? why does not thy blood riſe in thy face? Why ſhould not ſhame and fear work upon the apprehenſion of GOD's ſeeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that GOD ſees thee, is a greater ſurprize and diſcovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world ſtood by thee. SERM. CXXXV.

2. Live as thoſe that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehenſion, that GOD takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this, would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a reſtraint upon us as to ſin; *ſic vivamus tanquam in conſpectu vivamus.* Seneca. It were well if men would live as if any body ſaw them; but to live as if ſome worthy and excellent perſon were always preſent with us, and did obſerve us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are ſome ſins of that uglineſs and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the preſence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are ſome perſons of ſuch worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia ſupprimerent. Epicurus* had this good conceit of himſelf, that he could adviſe others ſo to act as if he ſtood by, *fac omnia tanquam ſpectet Epicurus*; but Seneca inſtanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lælius,

Ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus.

2.

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and shall not the presence of the divine majesty be an eternal restraint upon us?

This was David's course to keep himself from sin, Psal. xxxix. 1. "I will take heed to my ways, while "the wicked is before me;" how much more in the presence of GOD? "I have kept thy precepts and "thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee," Psal. cxix 168. And it was wisely advised by Seneca, "that we should so live when we are among "men, as believing GOD sees us: and when there "is none but he sees us, let us behave ourselves be-"fore him, as if men did stare upon us."

III. GOD's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocrisy: how vain it is to make a shew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a mask of religion, and paint ourselves beautifully without, when "inward-"ly we are full of rottenness and uncleanness; to "honour GOD with our lips, when our hearts are "far from him." If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them; therefore the best way for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with GOD, who "knows our thoughts afar off," to whom all our disguises are transparent, and all our little arts of concealment signify nothing, 'tis a madness to hide our iniquity in our bosom. With this argument our SAVIOUR convinceth the hypocritical Pharisees, Luke xvi. 15. "Ye are they that justify your selves before "men; but GOD knoweth your hearts."

2. If GOD know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourselves with inward purity and holiness, because of the pure eyes which behold the most intimate and secret motions

of

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of your ſouls; therefore "cleanſe your hearts from "wickedneſs: how long ſhall vain thoughts lodge "within you?" Fear and ſhame from men lay a great reſtraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a ſtrange freedom do we take within our own breaſts? This is an argument of the ſecret atheiſm that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himſelf in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares, that he reverenceth men more than GOD; that he either diſbelieves a GOD, or deſpiſeth him.

Therefore "keep your hearts with all diligence," becauſe they are peculiarly under GOD's inſpection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts, becauſe no eye ſees you, aſk your ſelves, "Doth not he that pondereth the heart conſider it? "And he that keepeth thy ſoul, doth he not know "it?" as the wiſe man ſpeaks," Prov. xxiv. 12.

And whatever you do in the ſervice of GOD "do "it heartily as to the LORD." Indeed, if we did only worſhip GOD, "to be ſeen of men," an external worſhip would be ſufficient: but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but GOD; he is a ſpirit, and ſees our ſpirits, therefore we muſt "worſhip him "in ſpirit and in truth." 1 Theſ. ii. 4. Not "as pleaſing men, but GOD, who trieth our "hearts." David uſeth this argument to his ſon Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "And thou, Solomon, "my ſon, know thou the GOD of thy father, and "ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing "mind; for the LORD ſearcheth all hearts, and un-"derſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Whatever liberty we may take to our ſelves now, and

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how careleſs ſoever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the ſcripture aſſures us, that he, who knows our hearts, will one day judge us according to them. Jer. xvii. 10. "I the "LORD ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to "give every man according to his ways." And the apoſtle ſpeaks of "a day coming wherein GOD "will judge the ſecrets of men by JESUS CHRIST," Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.

This is matter of encouragement to us in many caſes: in our ſecret troubles, Pſal. cxlii. 3. "When "my ſpirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou "kneweſt my path." In caſes of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men; which though we do not know, yet GOD knows them: So the apoſtles, Acts i. 24. when they did not know whom to chuſe for an apoſtle, they refer it to GOD; and "they prayed and ſaid, Thou, LORD, which know-"eſt the hearts of all, ſhew whether of theſe two "thou haſt choſen." But eſpecially this is matter of comfort to us, when we ſuffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocriſy, and falſeneſs, and inſincerity; then to be able to appeal to "the ſearcher of "hearts," as to our innocency and ſincerity, and to ſay with the prophet Jeremiah "O LORD of hoſts, "that trieſt the righteous, and ſeeſt the reins and the "heart, unto thee have I opened my cauſe," ch. xx. 12. and with St. Peter, "GOD which know-"eth the hearts, bare them witneſs," Acts xv. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing. "The LORD knows "the thoughts of men, that they are vanity," Pſal. xciv. 11. They are vanity, becauſe he knows them, and can defeat them; he can "bring their counſels

"to

" to nought, and make their devices of none effect." SERM. CXXXV.
He is conscious to the first motions of their hearts; he sees those cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can snare them in their own policies, and turn " their counsels " into foolishness." Thou that putteſt a mask upon a wicked design, and hideſt the malice and revenge of thine heart under a dissembling countenance, GOD sees thy design, and hath a thousand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their design with all imaginable caution, and that their counsels cannot miscarry, being out of all possibility of human discovery or prevention; for all this " their counsels may come to " nought," and though " they have resolved it," yet it may " not stand; he that sets in the heavens " laughs at them, the LORD hath them in derision." As wise as they are, they are guilty of this oversight, that they did not take GOD into consideration, by whom they are surprized and discovered. He that sees their design, can blast it in a moment; he " can speak the word," and " thy breath shall go " forth, and thou shalt return to thy dust, and in " that very day thy thoughts perish, Psal. cxlvi. 4.

5. If GOD only knows the hearts of men, then " what art thou, O man, that judgeſt another's " heart?" This condemns the uncharitableness of men, who take upon them to judge and censure men's hearts, which is, " to speak evil of the things which " they know not;" to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James saith, ch. iv. 12. " There is one law-giver, that is " able to save, and to destroy; who art thou that " judgeſt another?" is proportionably true in this case; there is but " one that knows the heart; who " art

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" art thou then that judgeſt another man's heart ?" Who art thou, O man! that takeſt upon thee to ſit in judgment upon thy brother, and to paſs ſentence upon his heart, to pronounce him a hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch ? Art thou a man, and the ſon of man, and wilt thou aſſume to thy ſelf the prerogative of God ? Man can only look to the outward appearance ; but " GOD ſeeth the heart."

There's nothing doth more palpably diſcover the unchriſtian ſpirit of that new ſect which is of late riſen up amongſt us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to cenſure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breaſt : but they are not alone guilty of this ; thoſe who are ſo ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of GOD. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule ; or a man wicked, as to his preſent ſtate, if the general courſe of his life and actions be wicked ; for our SAVIOUR tells us, " by their fruits ye ſhall " know them." This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be ſure it is ſo : but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profeſſion of religion, and whoſe external converſation is unblameable ; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou canſt have no evidence ; this is " to aſ- " cend into heaven," and ſtep into " the throne of " GOD, and to be like the moſt High ;" for " he, " even he only, knows the hearts of the children " of men."

IV. From GOD's knowledge of future events, we may learn,

1. The vanity of aſtrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretel future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of theſe

arts

arts hath been sufficiently shewn by learned men, from the weakness and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon; I shall only for the present take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that "GOD only knows future events." From prudent collections and observations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in some cases; but there are no certain perspective-glasses, with which we can see future events, but divine revelation; therefore whoever takes upon him to foretel future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himself that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and GOD delights to chastise the curiosity, and cross the predictions of these vain pretenders, Isa. xliv. 24, 25. "Thus saith the LORD that "formed thee, I am the LORD that maketh all "things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, "that spreadeth abroad the earth by my self: that "frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh "diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, "and maketh their knowledge foolish." As he also in scripture threatens those who consult them, and rely upon them. Those who go to astrologers, or wise men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they "forsake GOD," and "betake themselves to lying "vanities."

2. Refer future things to GOD, who only knows them; trust him with all events; "cast your care "upon him." When you have used your best prudence, and wisdom, and diligence for your supply and security for the future, leave the rest to GOD, "for your heavenly father knoweth" both your wants and your dangers. When we are over-solicitous about future things, we take GOD's proper work

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work out of his hands, and usurp the government of the world. Why do we "take too much upon us? "We are but of yesterday," and "know not what "will be to morrow."

Mind your present duty and work, and leave events to GOD. "Secret things belong to the "LORD our GOD; but those things that are re- "vealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all "the words of his law," Deut. xxix. 29. Do your duty, "commit the rest to GOD in well-doing."

In this world we are in a mix'd condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happiness and misery: what is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wisdom and pity to mankind, GOD hath concealed and hid the rest from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us, because the best things of this world are but shallow and empty, and if we could see them before-hand, we should prevent our selves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the sweetness which is in them by delightful fore-thoughts of them: and he hath concealed future evils from us, lest we should torment our selves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens, futuri temporis exitum,
Caliginosâ nocte premit Deus.
Ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make your selves miserable with fear of being so; *ante miserias miser.* Use all wise means to prevent what you fear, and then be satisfied, and be as happy as you can 'till misery come, go not forth to meet it, "sufficient for the day is the "evil thereof;" do not anticipate the evils of to morrow, and take present possession of an evil to come; "cast your care upon him" who hath promised to "care for you."

SER-

SERMON CXXXVI.

The wisdom, glory, and sovereignty of GOD.

JUDE, ver. 25.

To the only wise GOD *our* SAVIOUR, *be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and ever.*

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I AM treating of the attributes of GOD, particularly of those which relate to the divine understanding, his knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge of GOD only implies his bare understanding of things; but his wisdom implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, the skill of making and governing, and administring all things in number, weight, and measure. The knowledge of GOD rather considers things absolutely, and in themselves: the wisdom of GOD considers rather the respects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means, and ends; accordingly I describe them thus: the knowledge of GOD is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumstances. The wisdom of GOD is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and opposition, their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. I have largely spoken to the first of these: I come now to the

Second, the wisdom of GOD in general; together with his majesty and sovereignty, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

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First, that "God is the only wise God." In handling of this, I shall shew,

1. In what sense God may be said to be the "only wise God."

2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what sense God may be said to be "the "only wise God." For answer to this, we may take notice, that there are some perfections of God that are incommunicable to the creatures; as, his independency and eternity. These God only possesseth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is independent and eternal: but there are other perfections which are communicable, that is, which the creatures may, in some measure and degree, partake of, as knowledge, and wisdom, and goodness, and justice, and power, and the like; yet these the scriptures do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in such a peculiar and divine manner, as doth shut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them. I shall give you some instances of this. His goodness, this is reserved to God alone, Matth. xix. 17. "Why "callest thou me good? there is none good, but "one, that is God:" his power and immortality, 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the blessed and only "potentate; who only hath immortality:" his wisdom, 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only wise God:" Rom. xvi. 27. "To God only wise be glory:" his holiness, Rev. xv. 14. "For thou only art holy." The transcendent degree and singularity of these divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive: so that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfec-

tion wherein GOD possesseth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: so that, in this sense, "there is none good but GOD;" he only is holy, he is the only wise: in so inconceivable a manner doth GOD possess even those perfections, which in some degree he communicates; and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesseth them; so that when we consider any of these divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature: but we must say, that the goodness and wisdom of GOD are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, GOD may be said to be only wise in these two respects.

1. As being originally and independently wise.

2. As being eminently and transcendently so.

1. GOD only is originally and independently wise. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him: Rom. xi. 33, 34. "O the depth of the riches "both of the wisdom and knowledge of GOD! How "unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways "past finding out! For who hath known the mind "of the LORD, or who hath been his counsellor? "or who hath first given to him, and it shall be "recompensed unto him again? For of him, and "through him, and to him are all things, to whom "be glory for ever. Amen." He challengeth any creature to come forth and say, that they have given wisdom, or any other perfection, to GOD: no, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him: Prov. ii. 6. "For the LORD giveth wisdom." Eccl. ii. 26. "GOD giveth to a man that is good "in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy."

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Dan. ii. 21. "He giveth wiſdom to the wiſe," and "knowledge to them that know underſtanding."

2. He is eminently and tranſcendently ſo: and this follows from the former, becauſe GOD is the fountain of wiſdom, therefore it is moſt eminently in him: Pſal. xciv. 9, 10. "He that planted the "ear, ſhall he not hear? he that formed the eye, "ſhall he not ſee? he that teacheth man knowledge, "ſhall not he know?" In like manner we may reaſon concerning all other attributes of GOD, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently poſſeſt of them himſelf; the greateſt wiſdom of the creatures is nothing in oppoſition to the wiſdom of GOD, nothing in compariſon to it.

Nothing in oppoſition to it: Job v. 13. "He "taketh the wiſe in their own craftineſs." Job ix. 4. "He is wiſe in heart, and mighty in ſtrength: "who hath hardned himſelf againſt him, and proſ- "pered?" Prov. xxi. 30. "There is no wiſdom, "nor underſtanding, nor counſel, againſt the LORD." 1 Cor. i. 19. "He will deſtroy the wiſdom of the "wiſe;" v. 29. and by fooliſh things confound "the wiſe."

Nothing in compariſon of it. There are a great many that pretend to wiſdom; but moſt are deſtitute of true wiſdom; and thoſe who have it, have it with many imperfections and diſadvantages. Uſually thoſe who are deſtitute of true wiſdom, pretend moſt to it, Job xi. 12. "Vain man "would be wiſe, though he be born like a wild aſs's "colt." The high and the great of this world pretend to it: Job xxxii. 9. "great men are not always "wiſe." Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philoſophers were great profeſſors of wiſdom, Rom. i. 22. "Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they

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" became fools," they were " wise to do evil, but " to do good they had no understanding." As the prophet speaks, Jeremiah iv. 22. The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a craftiness than a wisdom. Men call it prudence; but they are glad to use many arts to set it off, and make it look like wisdom; by silence, and secresy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods, and gestures. The scripture calls it " the wisdom of this world," 1 Cor. ii. 6. and a " fleshly wisdom," 2 Cor. i. 12. It is wisdom misapplied, it is the pursuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and designs of this world are far from wisdom: 1 Cor. iii. 20. " The LORD knoweth the " thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." That cannot be wisdom, which mistakes it's great end, which minds mean things, and neglects those which are of greatest concernment to them: Job xxii. 2. " He that is wise, is profitable to himself." Prov. ix. 12. " If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy " self." Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to say, *Ne quicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret.* The wise sages of the world, as to the best things are fools, Matt. xi. 25. " GOD hath hid these " things from the wise and prudent." There are many that are " wise in their own conceits; but there " is more hope of a fool than of them," Prov. xxvi. 12. So that the greatest part of that which passeth for wisdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quàm nihil sapere*; we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir sapiens*, Tully. Those few in the world that are " the children of true wisdom," they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not usually so wise for their souls, and for eternity, as men of this world, Luke xvi. 8. " The children of this world are in " their

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" their generation wiſer than the children of light." It is attended with many inconveniencies, Eccl. i. 18. " In much wiſdom there is much grief;" he ſpeaks of the wiſdom about natural things.

But we need not inſtance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wiſdom which are to be found in good men, in wiſdom's own children; the wiſdom of GOD needs not theſe foils to ſet it off: the wiſdom of man in innocency, or of the higheſt angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wiſdom of GOD. We mortal men many times miſtake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accompliſhing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehenſion of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitneſs and oppoſition of them one to another: but the divine wiſdom propounds to itſelf the higheſt and beſt ends, and hath a perfect comprehenſion of the fitneſs and unfitneſs of all things one to another: ſo that angels are but fooliſh beings to GOD. Job iv. 17. " His angels he chargeth with folly." Job, upon a full enquiry after wiſdom, concludes that it only belongs to GOD, that he only is perfectly poſſeſſed of it. Job xxviii. 12, &c. " But where ſhall " wiſdom be found? and where is the place of un- " derſtanding?" In ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; GOD only hath it, ver. 23. " GOD know- " eth the place thereof."

II. I ſhall prove that this perfection belongs to GOD,

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, and
2. From Scripture.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon. I have often

often told you the perfections of GOD are not to be proved by way of demonstration, because there is no cause of them; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wisdom belongs to GOD. Among men folly is looked upon as the greatest defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and disgrace, than vice and wickedness; it is of so ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true esteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedness, the greatest imperfection; and, on the contrary, wisdom is the highest perfection next to holiness and goodness; it is usually more cried up in the world than any thing else. Reason tells us, though the scripture had not said it; that "wisdom excels "folly as much as light doth darkness," Eccl. ii. 13. "The wisdom of a man maketh his face to "shine," Eccl. viii. 1. "Wisdom is a defence," vii. 12. and ver. 19. "Wisdom strengthneth the wise "more than ten mighty men that are in the city."

And the denial of this perfection to GOD would argue many other imperfections; it would be an universal blemish to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of GOD. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wisdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power should act without the conduct and direction of infinite wisdom! it would eclipse the providence of GOD, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the prophet represents GOD's providence. There can be no counsel, no fore-cast, no orderly government of the world

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world without wisdom. The goodness, and mercy, and justice, and truth of GOD, could not shine with that lustre, were it not for his wisdom, which doth illustrate these with so much advantage.

I need not bring testimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expressions of their admiration of GOD's wise government of the world. I need not trouble you with quotations of particular testimonies. Epicurus indeed denied that GOD either made or governed the world; but he must needs acknowledge him to have been a very wise being, because he made him happy, which cannot be without wisdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wisdom. Aristotle seems to have supposed the world to be a necessary result and emanation from GOD: but then the other sects of philosophers did suppose the world to be the free product of GOD's goodness and wisdom.

2. From scripture; Job ix. 4. "He is wise in "heart;" xxxvi. 5. "He is mighty in strength "and wisdom." Dan. ii. 20. "Blessed be the name "of GOD for ever and ever, for wisdom and might "are his." Hither we may refer those texts, which attribute wisdom to GOD in a singular and peculiar manner, Rom. xvi. 27. and those which speak of GOD as the fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his creatures, Dan. ii. 21. James i. 5. and those texts which speak of the wisdom of GOD in the creation of the world, Psal. civ. 24. "O "LORD, how wonderful are thy works, in wisdom "hast thou made them all!" Jer. x. 12. "Who "hath established the world by his wisdom, and "stretched forth the heavens by his discretion;" in the providence and government of the world. Dan. ii. 20. "Wisdom and strength are his, and he "changeth

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" changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings, " and setteth up kings:" and in many other places, in the redemption of mankind. Therefore CHRIST is called " the wisdom of GOD," 1 Cor. i. 24. and the dispensation of the gospel, " the hidden wisdom " of GOD, and the manifold wisdom of GOD," Eph. ii. 10.

If then GOD be only wise, the original and only fountain of it, from thence we learn,

First, to go to him for it, Jam. i. 5. " If any man " lack wisdom, let him ask it of GOD." There are many conceited men, that think they are rich and increased, and stand in need of nothing. The apostle doth not speak, as if there were some that did not want wisdom, but because there are some so proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; those are stark fools, and GOD resists such foolish and proud men: but if any man, sensible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to GOD, " he " gives liberally, and upbraids no man." We are ashamed to learn wisdom of men, lest they should contemn and upbraid us with our folly: men are envious and unwilling that others should be as wise as themselves; but GOD's goodness makes him willing to impart wisdom: " he gives liberally, and upbraids " no man."

This is the most desirable accomplishment and perfection; " happy is the man that getteth wisdom; " wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wis- " dom:" it is better than those things that are of the highest value among men, as Solomon often makes the comparison. Now because " it comes " down from above," we should look up for it; it is by the revelation of his will, and the wise counsels of his word, that we are made " wise unto salvati-

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" on;" therefore we should beg of him, that " he " would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation " in the knowledge of himself," Eph. i. 17.

2. If GOD be only wise in such an eminent and transcendent degree, then let us be humble. There is no cause of boasting, seeing " we have nothing " but what we have received." The lowest instance, the least specimen of divine wisdom out-shines the highest pitch of human wisdom; " the foolishness " of GOD is wiser than men," 1 Cor. i. 25. therefore " let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," Jer. ix. 29. Of all things we should not be proud of wisdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wisdom, by the way that he would raise it. No such evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wise; *sapientis animus nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet*, Cic. To pride our selves in our wisdom, is the way to have our folly made manifest. GOD threatens " to destroy the wisdom of " the wise men," and " to turn their wisdom into " foolishness."

3. We should labour to partake of the wisdom of GOD, so far as it is communicable. The greatest wisdom that we are capable of, is to distinguish between good and evil; " to be wise to that which is " good," as the apostle speaks, Rom. xvi. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make provision for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear GOD and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive instruction, and to win souls; these are the characters which the scripture gives of wisdom. When Job had declared, that the excellency of the divine wisdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wisdom is, which is proper for us; " and unto man he said, the fear of the LORD, that

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" is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is un- SERM. CXXXVI.
" derstanding." There are many that are wise to worldly ends and purposes, as our SAVIOUR tells us; wise to get riches, and to ascend to honours: but this is not the wisdom which we are to labour after; this is but a short-witted prudence, to serve a present turn, without any prospect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wise for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If GOD be only wise, then put your trust and confidence in him. Whom should we trust rather than infinite wisdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodness and power? In all cases of difficulty trust him for direction, " acknowledge him in all " thy ways," that he may " direct thy steps; com- " mit thy way unto the LORD, and lean not to " thine own understanding. The race is not to " the swift, nor the battel to the strong," but the providence of GOD disposeth all these things. And if we rely upon our own wisdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as our own wisdom is a broken reed, so the wisdom of other men, Isa. xxxi. 1, 2. GOD curseth them that " go down into Egypt, and " trust to their strength and wisdom, but look not " to the holy one of Israel, neither seek the LORD; " yet he also is wise," saith the prophet.

5. Let us adore the wisdom of GOD, and say with St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. 17. " To the only wise GOD, " be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen:" and with Daniel, " blessed be the name of GOD for " ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his." Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wisdom in men; but the divine

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wisdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and blessing, and praise. Thanksgiving respects the benefits we receive: but we bless GOD when we acknowledge any excellency: for as GOD's blessing us, is to do us good; so our blessing him, is to speak good of him: as all GOD's perfections are the objects of our blessing, so more especially his wisdom is of our praise; for the praise of GOD is to take notice of the wise design and contrivance of his goodness and mercy towards us.

Before I pass on to the other particulars contained in these words, I cannot but take notice, that this wise GOD, here spoken of, is stiled our SAVIOUR, which some understand of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were so, it were all one to my purpose, which is in the next place to shew, that glory, and majesty, and dominion, and power, belong to the divine being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of CHRIST, yet seeing there are so many plain texts in scripture for the proof of it, we have the less reason to stretch doubtful places; and that this is so, will appear to any one who considers that the title of SAVIOUR is several times in scripture attributed to GOD the father; besides that in a very ancient and authentick copy we find the words read somewhat otherwise, and so as to put this out of all controversy, *μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα*, &c.

Having premised thus much for the clearing of these words, I shall briefly consider, first, GOD's glory and majesty, and then his dominion and sovereignty.

First, GOD's glory and majesty. By majesty, we

we may understand the greatness, or eminent excel- SERM. CXXXVI.
lency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, and whereby the divine nature is set and placed infinitely above all other beings; I say, the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, more especially from those great perfections, his goodness, and wisdom, and power, and holiness.

And his glory is a manifestation of this excellency, and a just acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in scripture, GOD is said to be "glorious in power," and "glorious in holiness," and his goodness is called "his glory;" and here in the text, glory and majesty are ascribed to him upon the account of his wisdom and goodness.

That these belong to GOD, I shall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did constantly ascribe greatness to GOD, and that as resulting chiefly from his goodness, as appears by their frequent conjunction of these two attributes, goodness and greatness. Opt. Max. were their most familiar titles of the Deity; to which I will add that known place of Seneca, *primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine quâ nulla majestas.*

2. From scripture. It were endless to produce all those texts wherein greatness and glory are ascribed to GOD. I shall mention two or three. Deut. x. 17. "the LORD is a great GOD;" Psal. xxiv. 10. he's called "the king of glory;" civ. 1. he is said to be "clothed with majesty and honour. The "whole earth is full of his glory." Hither belong all those doxologies in the old and new testament, wherein greatness, and glory, and majesty are ascribed to GOD.

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a person great and glorious, and what is the way to majesty, viz. "real "worth and excellency," and particularly, that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is goodness; this is that which advanceth a person, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this casts a lustre upon a man, and "makes his face to shine." Aristotle tells us, that honour is nothing else but the "signification of the esteem which we have of a "person for his goodness; for, saith he, to be good, "and to do good, is the highest glory." God's goodness is his highest glory; and there is nothing so glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name; "ascribe ye greatness to our God," Deut. xxxii. 3. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power," Psal. xxix. 1. The glory and majesty of God calls for our esteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we should "glori-"fy God in our spirits," by an inward esteem and reverence of his majesty. The thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence: how much more should the apprehensions of the divine majesty strike an awe upon our spirits in all our addresses to him? His excellency should make us afraid, and keep us from all saucy boldness and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the distance which is between the majesty of God, and our meanness. And we should "glorify him in our bodies," with outward worship and adoration; that is, by all external significations of reverence and respect; and we should glorify him in our lives and actions. The highest glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour

deavour to be like him; *satis illos coluit, quisquis imitatus est*, Seneca. Hereby we manifest and shew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in case of sin and provocation, we are to give glory to GOD by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holiness, who hates sin; and of his justice, which will punish it; and of the mercy of GOD, which is ready to pardon it; for it is the glory of GOD to pass by a provocation. SERM. CXXXVI.

3. We should take heed of robbing GOD of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by ascribing those titles, or that worship to any creature, which is due to GOD alone. This is the reason which is given of the second commandment; "I the LORD "am a jealous GOD." GOD is jealous of his honour, "and will not give his glory to another, nor "his praise to graven images," Isa. xlii. 8. Upon this account we find the apostle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, because thereby they debased the esteem of GOD, and did shew they had unworthy thoughts of him, Rom. i. 21, 23. "When "they knew GOD, they glorified him not as GOD, "but became vain in their imaginations: and chang-"ed the glory of the incorruptible GOD, into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds "and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the divine nature; that is, that he is a spirit, and so incapable of being represented by any material or sensible image.

Secondly, I come now to speak of the sovereignty and dominion of GOD. In which I shall shew,

First, what we are to understand by the sovereignty and dominion of GOD. By these we mean the full

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full and absolute right, and title, and authority which GOD hath to, and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right results from the effects of that goodness, and power, and wisdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrue to GOD a sovereign right and title to all his creatures, and a full and absolute authority over them; that is, such a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any superior, nor is subject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *summum imperium*, because there is no power above it to check or controul it, and therefore there can be none greater than this. And it is absolute, because all the creatures have what they have from GOD, and all depend upon his goodness, and therefore they owe all possible duty and perpetual subjection so long as they continue in being, because it is solely by his power and goodness, that they continue; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any person or thing, that GOD hath to all things, *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that sovereignty and dominion signifies a full right, and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and an absolute authority over them, to govern them and dispose of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaseth, that is not contrary to his essential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural state and condition of the creature.

And for our better understanding of this, and the preventing of mistakes, which men are apt to fall into about the sovereignty of GOD, I will shew,

I. Wherein it doth not consist. And,

II. Wherein it doth consist.

1. Where-

I. Wherein it doth not consist.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himself in the extreme misery of innocent and undeserving creatures; I say, not in a right; for the right that GOD hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there's none, who because he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madness, to doubt whether extreme and eternal misery be not a greater evil, than simple being is a good. I know they call it physical goodness; but I do not understand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is good or desirable in being, when it only serves to be a foundation of the greatest and most lasting misery? and we may safely say, that the just GOD will never challenge more than an equitable right. GOD doth not claim any such sovereignty to himself, as to crush and oppress innocent creatures without a cause, and to make them miserable without a provocation. And because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless jealousies and unworthy thoughts of GOD, he hath given us his oath to assure us of the contrary. "As "I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the "death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn "and live." So far is he from taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be much rather pleased, if sinners would, by repentance, avoid and escape his justice, than that they should fall under it. The good GOD cannot be glorified or pleased in doing evil to any, where justice doth not re-

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quire it; nothing is further from infinite goodness, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monster of men, and of a devilish temper, that can do so; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after such a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in imposing laws upon his creatures, which are impossible either to be understood or observed by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reasonable creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any power to impossibilities.

3. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to necessitate them to sin, or effectually to procure the sins of men, and to punish them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God; so to the nature of a reasonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deserve punishment for what it cannot help. And men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagin that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a secret design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot against heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a revenue of glory to his justice. There's no generous and good man, but would spit in that man's face, that should charge him with such a design; and if they who are but very drops of goodness, in comparison of God, the infinite ocean of goodness, would take it for such a reproach, shall we attribute that to the best being in the world, which we would detest and abominate in our selves?

II. Wherein

II. Wherein the sovereignty of GOD doth consist.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the essential perfections of GOD, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impose what laws he pleaseth upon his creatures, whether natural and reasonable; or positive, of trial of obedience, provided they contradict not the nature of GOD, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved punishment in a case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, so the evil he inflicts be short of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther, in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it should so seem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaseth. In these the sovereignty of GOD consists; and if there be any thing else that can be reconciled with the essential perfections of GOD.

Secondly, for the proof and confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the heathens, that GOD is "the LORD and sovereign of the world, "and of all creatures." Hence Plato calls him τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα; and Tully, *omnium rerum Dominum*, LORD of all; and this the scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him, "LORD "of all; KING of kings, and LORD of lords;" to which we may refer all those doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to GOD. I will only mention that eminent confession of Nebuchadnezzar, a great king, who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to ac-

knowledge, that "GOD was the most High," Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

First, negatively, we cannot, from the sovereignty of GOD, infer a right to do any thing that is unsuitable to the perfection of his nature; and consequently that we are to rest satisfied with such a notion of dominion and sovereignty in GOD, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of justice and goodness: nay, it would be little less than a horrid and dreadful blasphemy, to say that GOD can, out of his sovereign will and pleasure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of GOD, and the essential perfections of the Deity; or to imagin that the pleasure and will of the holy, and just, and good GOD, is not always regulated and determined by the essential and indispensable laws of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness.

Secondly, positively; we may infer from the sovereignty and dominion of GOD,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge GOD for our LORD and sovereign, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himself a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmost possibility of our love, "to love him with all our hearts, and "souls, and strength;" because the souls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render these to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable subjection, and observance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmost of our endeavours, to conform our selves to his will, and to those laws which he hath imposed upon us.

4. In

4. In case of offence and disobedience, we are, without murmuring, to submit to what he shall inflict upon us, "to accept of the punishment of our "iniquity," and "patiently to bear the indignati- "on of the LORD," because we have sinned against him, who is our LORD and sovereign. SERM. CXXXVI.

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The wisdom of GOD in the creation of the world.

PSALM civ. 24.

O LORD, *how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.*

I AM treating of the attributes and properties of GOD, particularly those which relate to the divine understanding, which I told you are his knowledge and wisdom. I have finished the first, the knowledge of GOD. The last day I spake, concerning the wisdom of GOD in general; but there are three eminent arguments, and famous instances of GOD's wisdom, which I have reserved for a more large and particular handling. The wisdom of GOD shines forth in the creation of the world, in the government of it, and in the redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST. Of these three I shall speak severally. SERM. CXXXVII.

I begin with the first, the argument of GOD's wisdom, which the creation doth furnish us withal. In this visible frame of the world which we behold with

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with our eyes, which way soever we look, we are encountred with ocular demonstrations of the wisdom of GOD. What the apostle saith of the power of GOD is true likewise of his wisdom, Rom. i. 20. "The invisible things of him from the crea- "tion of the world are clearly seen, being under- "stood by the things that are made, even his eter- "nal power and godhead:" so the eternal wisdom of GOD is understood "by the things which are "made." Now the creation is an argument of the wisdom of GOD, as it is an effect of admirable counsel and wisdom. As any curious work, or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; so the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitness of the works of GOD, argue the infinite wisdom of him who made them; a work so beautiful and magnificent, such a stately pile as heaven and earth is, so curious in the several pieces of it, so harmonious in all it's parts, every part so fitted to the service of the whole, and each part for the service of another; is not this a plain argument that there was infinite wisdom in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I shall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we see with our eyes, which we call the world, or the creation, is contrived after the best manner, and hath upon it evident impressions of counsel and wisdom. I grant the wisdom of GOD is infinite, and that many of the ends and designs of his wisdom are "unsearchable, and "past finding out," both in the works of creation and providence; and that "though a wise man "seek to find out the work of GOD from the be- "ginning to the end, he shall not be able to do it;" and we shall never be able to exhaust all the various wisdom and contrivance which is in the works of

GOD; though the oftener, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we shall see to admire in them; the more we study this book of the creation, the more we shall be astonished at the wisdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may discover something of the wisdom of GOD, though it be infinite. As the effects of infinite power may fall under our senses, so the designs of infinite wisdom may fall under our reason and understanding; and when things appear to our best reason plainly to be ordered for the best, and the greatest advantages of the world and mankind, so far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwise, as they might have been a hundred thousand ways, they would not have been so well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwise, is the result of wisdom.

Now the wisdom of GOD in the creation will appear by considering the works of GOD. Those who have studied nature, can discourse these things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in astronomy, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in anatomy, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, so it would probably be above most of your capacities; therefore I shall content myself with some general and more obvious instances of the divine wisdom, which shine forth so clear in his works, that "he that runs "may read it."

1. I shall take a short survey of the several parts of the world.

2. Single out man, the master-piece of the visible Creation.

1. If we survey the world, and travel over the several parts of it in our thoughts, we shall find that all

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all things in it are made with the greatest exactness, ranged in the most beautiful order, and serve the wisest and best ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of what is most visible, the sun, you see how by the wise order and constancy of it's course it makes day and night, winter and summer. This the psalmist takes notice of, Psal. xix. 1, 2. "The "heavens declare the glory of GOD; and the firma- "ment sheweth his handy work. Day unto day "uttereth speech; and night unto night sheweth "knowledge." It may easily be imagined many ways, how the sun might have had another course in reference to the earth; but no man can devise any other, that should not be very much to the prejudice of the world; so that this being the best, it is an argument that wisdom had the ordering and disposing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we shall see gods ascending and descending; I mean clear representations of divine wisdom in the treasures that are hid in the bowels of it, and those fruits that grow upon the surface of it. What vast heaps, and what variety of useful materials and minerals are scattered up and down in the earth, as one would think with a careless hand, but yet so wisely dispersed, as is most proper for the necessities and uses of several countries! Look upon the surface of the earth, and you shall find it clothed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and usefulness. Look upon the vast ocean, and there you may see the wisdom of GOD in bridling and restraining that unruly element, I mean, in sinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great measure

measure useless, and incapable of those inhabitants which now possess it. SERM. CXXXVII.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and sea, and you shall find all these inhabited and furnished with great store of living creatures of several kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with strong inclination to increase their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of these creatures armed either with strength or wit to oppose their enemy, or swiftness to fly from him, or strong holds to secure themselves. But the creation is a vast field, in which we may easily lose ourselves. I shall therefore call home our wandring thoughts; for we need not go out of ourselves for a proof of divine wisdom. I shall therefore,

2. Select the choicest piece of it, man, who is the top and perfection of this visible world. What is said of the elephant, or behemoth, Job xl. 19. in respect of the vast bigness and strength of his body, is only absolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, "the chief of the works of GOD, and upon "earth there is none like him." Man is *mundi utriusque nexus*, "the bond of both worlds," as Scaliger calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of spirits do meet, and unite; for in respect to his body, he is related to this visible world, and is of the earth; but in respect of his soul, he is allied to heaven, and descended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the several representations of GOD's wisdom, and the several parts of the creation; but we have not yet considered the best piece of the visible world, which we may speak of, without flattery of ourselves, and to the praise of our Maker. GOD, when he had

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made the world, "he made man after his own image." When he had finished the other part of the creation, he was pleased to set up this picture of himself in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we shall a little more particularly consider this piece of GOD's workmanship, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the rest, and consequently a higher instance of the divine wisdom. It is observed by some, that concerning the parts of the creation, GOD speaks the word, "let there be light," and "let there be a firmament, and there was so:" but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into consultation about him; "And GOD said, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness; "and let him have dominion," Gen. i. 26; as if man, above all the rest, were the effect and result of divine wisdom, and the creature of his counsel.

Man may be considered either in himself, and in respect of the parts of which he consists, soul and body; or with relation to the universe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Consider him in himself, as compounded of soul and body. Consider man in his outward and worse part, and you shall find that to be admirable, even to astonishment; in respect of which, the psalmist cries out, Psal. cxxxix. 14. "I am fearfully and "wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, "and that my soul knoweth right well." The frame of our bodies is so curiously wrought, and every part of it so full of miracle, that Galen, (who was otherwise backward enough to the belief of a GOD) when he had anatomized man's body, and carefully surveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitness and usefulness of every part of it, and the many several intentions

tions of every little vein, and bone, and muſcle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And thoſe excellent books of his, *de uſu partium*, "of "the uſefulneſs and convenient contrivance of every "part of the body," are a moſt exact demonſtration of the divine wiſdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, Gaſſendus ſaith, the whole work is writ with a kind of enthuſiaſm. The wiſdom of GOD, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious conſideration of the ſeveral parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate ſkill in anatomy, I chuſe rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unſkilfulneſs to be injurious to the divine wiſdom.

But this *domicilium corporis*, "the houſe of our "body," though it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble inhabitant that dwells in it. This cabinet, though it be exquiſitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely ſhort in value of the jewel that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reaſon and underſtanding exalt us above the reſt of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular proviſion for man, which it hath made for other creatures, becauſe it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reaſon. Man is not born clothed, nor armed with any conſiderable weapon for defence; but he hath reaſon and underſtanding to provide theſe things for himſelf; and this alone excels all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himſelf warmer and ſafer; he can foreſee dangers and provide againſt them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reaſon, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himſelf againſt their violence.

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If we consider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there should be at once in our understandings distinct comprehensions of such variety of objects; that it should pass in it's thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things past, and take a prospect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Because we are familiar to our selves, we cannot be strange and wonderful to our selves; but the great miracle of the world is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent instance of GOD's wisdom.

2. Consider man with relation to the universe, and you shall find the wisdom of GOD doth appear, in that all things are made so useful for man, who was designed to be the chief inhabitant of this visible world, the guest whom GOD designed principally to entertain in this house which he built. Not that we are to think, that GOD hath so made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himself, and possibly for many other uses than we can imagine; for we much over-value our selves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminish the wisdom of GOD, in restraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the use and service of man; and in reference to this end, you shall find that GOD hath made abundant and wise provision.

More particularly we will consider man,

1. In his natural capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the service and pleasure, for the use and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little use? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and GOD has furnished him with many objects to exercise

ercise his understanding upon, which would be so far useless and lost, if man were not. Who should observe the motions of the stars, and the courses of those heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature? Who should pry into the secret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world a creature endowed with reason and understanding? Would the beasts of the field study astronomy, or turn chymists, and try experiments in nature? SERM. CXXXVII.

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there! which can be imagined to be of little other use but for the pleasure of man. And if man had not been, they would have lost their grace, and been trod down by the beasts of the field, without pity or observation; they would not have made them into garlands and nose-gays. How many sorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beasts! and indeed they take no pleasure in them. What would all the vast bodies of trees have served for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what use would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of stone? Would the mole have admired the fine gold? Would the beasts of the forest have built themselves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Consider man in his geographical capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wisdom of God hath so ordered things, that the necessities of every country are supplied one way or other. Egypt hath no rains: but the river Nilus overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the line, where there are excessive heats, every day there are constant gales and breezes

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breezes of cool wind, to fan and refresh the scorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furnished with materials for silk, a light clothing; we that are cooler here in England, with materials for cloth, a warmer clothing; Russia and Muscovy, which are extreme cold, are provided with warm furs, and skins of beasts.

3. Consider man in his capacity of commerce and intercourse. Man is a sociable creature; besides the advantages of commerce with remoter nations, for supplying every country with those conveniencies and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wisdom of GOD does plainly appear, in disposing the sea into several parts of the world, for the more speedy commerce and intercourse of several nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, that had been needless and superfluous, because they might have been had without commerce; besides, that the great encouragement of intercourse among nations, which is so agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away: if every country had been, as now it is, destitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no sea to give an opportunity of traffick; the world had been very defective as to the use of man. Now here appears the wisdom of GOD, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the best.

Thus I have endeavoured to do something toward the displaying of GOD's wisdom in the workmanship of the world; although I am very sensible how much I have been mastered and oppressed by the greatness and weight of so noble an argument. For "who "can declare the works of GOD! and who can shew "forth all his praise!"

The use I shall make of what has been said, shall be in three particulars, 1. This

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1. This confutes the Epicureans, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things to chance. Thoſe things which are the proper effects of counſel, and bear the plain impreſſion of wiſdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madneſs is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wiſeſt agent upon counſel and deſign had contrived them; and yet to aſcribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be ſo wiſely framed, muſt pick holes in the creation, and ſhew ſome fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any anatomiſt pretend to ſhew how the body of man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uſes of a reaſonable creature than it is; or any aſtronomer to rectify the courſe of the ſun? As for the extravagant and blaſphemous ſpeech of Alphonſus, "that if he had ſtood at GOD's elbow "when he made the world, he could have told him "how to have made it better;" beſides his pride, it ſhews nothing but his ignorance; that he built his aſtronomy upon a falſe hypotheſis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that ſcience; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he miſtook the frame of it: but thoſe who have been moſt verſed in nature, and have moſt pried into the ſecrets of it, have moſt admired the workmanſhip both of the great world, and the leſs.

But if we muſt ſuppoſe the world to be as well made as wiſdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monſtrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better ſay, Archimedes did not make any of his engines by ſkill, but by chance; and might more eaſily maintain, that cardinal Richlieu did not manage affairs by any arts or policy, but

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but they fell out by mere chance. What pitiful shifts is Epicurus put to, when the best account he can give of the world, is this; "that matter always "was, and the parts of it in motion, and after a "great many trials, the parts of matter at length "hampered themselves in this fortunate order where-"in they now are; that men, at first, grew out of "the earth, were nourished by the navel-string, and "when they were strong enough, broke loose and "weaned themselves; that the nostrils were made "by the waters making themselves a passage out "of the body; and the stomach and bowels by the "waters forcing a passage downward; that the "members of the body were not made for those "uses for which they serve, but chanced to be so, "and the uses afterwards found out." Is it worth the while to advance such senseless opinions as these, to deny the wisdom of GOD? Is it not much easier, and more reasonable to say, that the wisdom of GOD made all these things, than to trouble our selves to imagin how all things should happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly disposition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wisdom and counsel? How long time might a man take to jumble a set of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem; yea, or to make a book of tolerable sense, though but in prose? How long might a man sprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careless hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance, than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could much more believe him,

if he ſhould tell me that Henry the VII.'s chapel in Weſtminſter was not built by any mortal man, but the ſtones did grow in thoſe forms into which they ſeem to us to be cut and graven; that the ſtones, and timber, and iron, and braſs, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themſelves into that delicate order, in which we ſee them ſo cloſe compacted, that it muſt be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much eaſier to imagin how a ſkilful workman ſhould raiſe a building, than how timber, and ſtones, and how that variety of materials which is required to a great and ſtately building, ſhould meet together all of a juſt bigneſs, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themſelves into that order? I inſiſt the longer upon this, becauſe I am ſenſible how much atheiſm hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire, and adore, and praiſe the wiſdom of GOD, "who hath eſtabliſhed the world by "his wiſdom, and ſtretched out the heavens by his "underſtanding; who hath made all things in num-"ber, weight, and meaſure;" that is, by exact wiſdom. The wiſe works of GOD are the proper object of our praiſe; and this is a day proper for the work of praiſe and thankſgiving. Now under the goſpel, ſince CHRIST was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praiſe and thankſgiving; but as GOD has given us CHRIST, ſo he hath given us our beings. We are not ſo to remember our redeemer, as to forget our creator. The goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom of GOD, which appears in the creation of the world, ought ſtill to be matter of admiration and praiſe to chriſtians. It is a great fault and neglect among chriſtians, that they are not

3.

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more taken up with the works of GOD, and the contemplation of the wisdom which shines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vast curious engine of the world, and the great artificer of all things. It was truly said by one, that most men are so stupid and inconsiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver, more than the works of GOD. There are many that have bestowed more eloquence in the praise of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquisite frame of the world, or any of the other works of GOD. We can admire the wisdom, and design, and skill of petty artists, and little engineers; but here is wisdom in the beauty and order of the creation. Did we love GOD, and take pleasure in the effects of his wisdom and power, we should be more in the contemplation of them. Psal. cxi. 2. "The "works of the LORD are great, sought out of all "them that have pleasure therein." Let us then say with the Psalmist; "O LORD, how manifold "are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them "all; the earth is full of thy riches, &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulness, admire the wisdom which hath made and disposed all things so fitly for our use and service, and with so merciful a respect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beasts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Psalmist often praising GOD upon this account, Psal. cxxxvi. 4, 5, &c. The wisdom which hath framed these bodies of ours. Psal. cxxxix. 14, 15, 16. which hath endowed us with knowledge and understanding. Elihu complains, that men were apt to overlook these great blessings of GOD, Job xxxv. 10, 11, 12. "But none saith, where is GOD

"my

" my maker, who giveth ſongs in the night? who " teacheth us more than the beaſts of the earth, and " maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven? There " they cry, but none giveth anſwer, becauſe of the " pride of evil men."

3. Uſe. Truſt the wiſdom of GOD, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wiſdom which hath framed thy body in ſo curious and exquiſite a manner, and formed thy ſpirit within thee, and hath made ſo many creatures, with reference to thy neceſſity and comfort, truſt him for thy future proviſion. Mat. vi. 25. " I ſay unto " you, take no thought for your lives, what ye " ſhall eat, &c. Is not the life more than meat? " and the body than rayment?" He hath given us our ſouls, he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made theſe bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the leſs? When thou art ready anxiouſly and ſolicitouſly to ſay, what ſhall I do for the neceſſaries of life? Conſider whence thou didſt receive thy life, who made this body of thine; thou mayeſt be aſſured, that the wiſdom which hath created theſe, conſidered how to ſupply them; the wiſdom of GOD knew that you would want all theſe, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore fear not.

SERMON CXXXVIII.

The wisdom of GOD in his providence.

1 PETER v. 7.

Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

SERM. cxxxviii. Preached at Kensington.

AMONGST the several duties which, towards the conclusion of this epistle, the apostle exhorts christians to, this is one, not to be overmuch solicitous and concerned about what may befal us, but to refer ourselves to the providence of GOD, which takes care of us. In speaking to this argument, I shall

I. Consider the nature of the duty here required, which is "to cast our care upon GOD."

II. The argument used to persuade us to it: because "he careth for us."

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word μέριμνα signifies an anxious care about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of mind about what may befal us; about the good that we hope for and desire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the apostle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of GOD, and his care, all those events which we are apt to be so solicitous and disquieted about. The expression seems to be taken out of Psal. lv. 22. "cast "thy burthen upon the LORD, and he shall sus"tain thee."

Now that we may not mistake our duty in this matter, I shall shew what is not here meant by "casting "all our care upon GOD;" and then, what is meant by it. The

The apoſtle doth not here intend to take men off from a provident care and diligence about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to reaſon, but to many expreſs precepts and paſſages of ſcripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the bleſſing of GOD, and the good ſucceſs of our affairs promiſed thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for thoſe of our family, which cannot be done without ſome ſort of care; and wherein ſlothfulneſs and negligence are condemned, and threatened with poverty; ſo that this is not "to caſt "our care upon GOD," to take no care of ourſelves, to uſe no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we deſire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of GOD, and to caſt that burthen upon him, which he expects we ſhould bear our ſelves.

But by "caſting our care upon GOD," the apoſtle intends theſe two things.

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed by us, we ſhould not be farther ſolicitous, nor trouble our ſelves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our SAVIOUR's meaning, when he bids us "take no care for the "morrow." When we have done what is fit for us for the preſent to do, we ſhould not diſquiet and torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things.

2. "Caſting our care upon GOD," implies, that we ſhould refer the iſſue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to diſpoſe all things to the beſt; entirely confiding in his wiſdom and goodneſs, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence reſolving to reſt ſatisfied and contented with the diſpoſals of his providence, whatever they be. You

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You see then the nature of the duty which the apostle here exhorts to, viz. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used on our parts, we should not be disquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to GOD, who hath the care of us, and all our concernments. Which is the

II. Thing I proposed to speak to, and which I intend chiefly to insist upon, viz. The argument which the apostle here useth to persuade us to this duty, of "casting all our care upon GOD," because "it is "he that careth for us:" and this implies in it these two things.

1. In general, that the providence of GOD governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a special care of them and their concerns; "He "careth for you." The apostle speaks this to them, not only as men, but as Christians. And thus the psalmist, from whom these words seem to be taken, does apply and limit this promise; "Cast thy bur- "then upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee; "he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

1. That GOD taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of GOD governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us. I shall not now enter upon a large proof of the providence of GOD; that is too large and intricate an argument for a short discourse, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and though it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almost generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reason;

reason; yet because the vindication of many particular appearances of providence, does in a great measure depend upon a full view and comprehension of the whole design, therefore we must necessarily refer our selves, for full satisfaction, as to several difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we shall see GOD's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole design, and then many particular passages, which may now seem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themselves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reason and regularity in them. SERM. XXXVIII.

Therefore I shall at present only briefly, and in the general, shew that it is very credible, that there is a wise providence that governs the world, and interests itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events which happen to us.

And I desire it may be observed in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this question concerning providence, doth suppose the being of GOD, and that "he made the world," as principles already known and granted, before we come to dispute of his providence; for it would be vain to argue about the providence of GOD, with those who question his being, and whether "the world "was made by him:" But supposing these two principles, "that GOD is," and "that he made the "world," it is very credible that he should take care of the government of it, and especially of one of the noblest parts of it, the race of mankind. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed so much power and wisdom in the raising of this great and magnificent pile, and furnishing every part of it with such variety of creatures, so exquisitely and so wisely fitted for the use and service of one another, should

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so soon as he had perfected it, forsake his own workmanship, and take no farther care of it; especially considering that it is no trouble and disquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpose for the regulating of any disorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wisdom, and power can do all things with all imaginable ease, knows all things, and can do all things, without any disturbance of it's own happiness.

And this hath always been the common apprehension of mankind, that GOD knows all things, and observes every thing that is done in the world, and when he pleaseth, interposes in the affairs of it. 'Tis true indeed, the Epicureans did deny that GOD either made the world or governs it; and therefore wise men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of GOD, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of so odious an opinion, they were content, for fashion sake, to own his being, provided they might take away the best and most substantial arguments for the proof of it. The rest of the philosophers owned a providence, at least a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not descend to a constant and particular care of every person, and every little event belonging to them, *interdum curiosus singulorum*, says Tully; now and then, when he pleases, he takes care of particular persons, and their lesser concernments; but many of them thought that GOD did generally neglect the smaller and more inconsiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt neque agellos singulorum & viticulas persequuntur*, "the gods overlook smaller matters, and "do not mind every man's little field and vine." Such imperfect apprehensions had they of the providence

dence of GOD. And though they would ſeem here- SERM. cxxxviii.
by to conſult the dignity and eaſe of the Deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of leſſer matters, yet, in truth and reality, they caſt a diſhonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burthen to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by aſſuring us of GOD's particular care of all perſons and events. Our SAVIOUR tells us, that GOD's providence extends to the leaſt and moſt inconſiderable creatures; "to the graſs of the "field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt in- "to the oven," Mat. vi. 30. "To the fowls of "the air," and that to the leaſt of them, even to "the ſparrows, two of which are ſold for a farthing, "and yet not one of them falleth to the ground "without GOD," Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of GOD extend to men, which are creatures far more conſiderable, and to the very leaſt thing that belongs to us, "to the very hairs "of our head, which are all numbred;" the loweſt inſtance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more general providence; and divine revelation hath rectified thoſe imperfect apprehenſions which men had about it, and hath ſatisfied us, that it extends itſelf to all particulars, and even to the leaſt things and moſt inconſiderable. And this is no ways incredible, conſidering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in reſpect of which GOD can with as much and greater eaſe take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to GOD for the good they want, and to be freed

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from the evils they fear, becauſe they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make conſcience of their duty, becauſe they believe GOD obſerves them, and will reward and puniſh their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of GOD, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion ſtands; we rob our ſelves of one of the greateſt comforts, and beſt refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happineſs in the next.

And though there be many diſorders in the world, eſpecially in the affairs of man, the moſt irregular and intractable piece of GOD's creation; yet this is far from being a ſufficient objection againſt the providence of GOD, if we conſider that GOD made man a free creature, and capable of abuſing his liberty, and intends this preſent life for a ſtate of trial in order to another, where men ſhall receive the juſt recompence of their actions here: and then if we conſider, that many of the evils and diſorders, which GOD permits to happen, are capable of being overruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to ſerve wiſe and excellent purpoſes, and that the providence of GOD does ſometimes viſibly and remarkably interpoſe, for the prevention and remedy of great diſorders and confuſions; I ſay conſidering all this, it is no blemiſh to the divine providence, to permit many of thoſe irregularities which are in the world, and ſuffer the fates of good and bad men to be ſo croſs and unequal in this life. For ſuppoſing another life after this, wherein men ſhall come to an account, and every man ſhall receive the juſt recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper ſeaſon and full opportunity of ſetting all things ſtrait, and no man ſhall have reaſon then, either to glory

in his wickedneſs, or to complain of his ſufferings in this world. This is the firſt, that GOD's providence governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reaſon, why we ſhould caſt our particular cares upon him, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of GOD is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and eſpecial care of them. The apoſtle ſpeaks this to Chriſtians, "caſt all your care on him, for he "careth for you." And this David limits in a more particular manner to good men; "caſt thy "burthen upon the LORD, and he will ſuſtain thee; "he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved."

The providence of GOD many times preſerves good men from thoſe evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interpoſition, reſcues them out of thoſe calamities which it ſuffers others to fall into; and GOD many times bleſſeth good men, with remarkable proſperity and ſucceſs in their affairs. To which purpoſe there are innumerable declarations and promiſes in the holy ſcriptures, ſo well known, that I ſhall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithſtanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are haraſſed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of GOD uſually ordereth it ſo, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and ſupport under them, and make better uſe and improvement of them than others; ſo that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii. 28. "we know "that all things work together for good to them

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" that love GOD." All the evils and afflictions, which happen to good men, conspire one way or other to the promoting of their happiness, many times in this world, to be sure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the same apostle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. " Our light affliction, " which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far " more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst " we look not," &c. And can we say GOD's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal sufferings with eternal glory: when through many hardships and tribulations, he at last brings us to a kingdom? Was Joseph neglected by GOD, when by a great deal of hard usage, and a long imprisonment, he was raised to the highest dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather, was not the providence of GOD very remarkable towards him, in making those sufferings so many steps to his glory, and the occasion of his advancement? And is not GOD's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulations and sufferings; and making " our light afflictions, which are but for " a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding " and eternal weight of glory?"

Thus you see what is implied in GOD's care of us in general; that he governs the world, and disposeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more especial care of them. Let us now see of what force this consideration is, to persuade to the duty enjoined in the text, " to cast all our care upon GOD;" that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been used on our part, not to be anxious and solicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to GOD. Now

this

this consideration, that "GOD cares for us," should be an argument to us, "to cast all our care upon "him," upon these two accounts: SERM. cxxxviii.

1. Because if "GOD cares for us," our concernments are in the best and safest hands.

2. Because all our anxiety and solicitude will do us no good.

1. Because if "GOD cares for us," our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and where we should desire to have them; infinitely safer, than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great satisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all disquieting thoughts; for if GOD undertakes the care of us, then we are sure that nothing shall happen to us, but by the disposal or permission of infinite wisdom and goodness. There are many things indeed, which to us seem chance and accident; but in respect of GOD, they are providence and design; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of second causes, but they are all wisely designed; and as they are appointed or permitted by GOD, they are the result of the deepest counsel, and the greatest goodness. And can we wish that we and our concernments should be in better or safer hands, than of infinite power and wisdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodness? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean our selves towards GOD as we ought, we may rest assured of his love and care of us; and if we do in good earnest believe the providence of GOD, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to those that love and serve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can, and will dispose them better for us, than we could manage them our selves, if we were left

to

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to ourſelves, and our affairs were put into the hands of our own counſel.

Put the caſe we had the entire ordering and diſpoſal of our ſelves, what were reaſonable for us to do in this caſe? We would ſurely, according to our beſt wiſdom and judgment, do the beſt we could for ourſelves; and when upon experience of our manifold ignorance and weakneſs, we had found our weightieſt affairs and deſigns frequently to miſcarry, for want of fore-ſight, or power; or ſkill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and diſappointments which human affairs are liable to, we ſhould then look about us; and if we knew any perſon much wiſer, and more powerful than ourſelves, who, we believed did heartily love us, and wiſh well to us, we would out of kindneſs to ourſelves, aſk his counſel in our affairs, and crave his aſſiſtance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wiſdom and good-will to us.

Now GOD is ſuch an one, he loves us as well as we do ourſelves, and deſires our happineſs as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are moſt conducing to it, and will moſt effectually ſecure it. And every man that believes thus of GOD, (as every man muſt do, that believes there is a GOD, for theſe are the natural and eſſential notions which all men have of the Deity) I ſay, every man that believes thus of GOD; the firſt thing he would do (if he knew not already that GOD had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himſelf to GOD, and to beſeech him with all earneſtneſs and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments

to

to him, and be pleaſed to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himſelf wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to diſpoſe of him as to him ſhould ſeem beſt. SERM. cxxxviii.

Now if GOD have prevented us herein, and without our deſire taken this care upon himſelf, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greateſt happineſs that could poſſibly have befallen us; and we ſhould, without any farther care and anxiety, uſing our own beſt diligence, and ſtudying to pleaſe him, chearfully leave our ſelves in his hands, with the greateſt confidence and ſecurity, that he will do all that for us which is really beſt; and with a firm perſuaſion, that that condition, and thoſe circumſtances of life, which he ſhall chuſe for us, will be no other but the very ſame which we would chuſe for ourſelves, if we were as wiſe as he.

And it is ſo natural for men to think thus of GOD, that the very heathen poet had the ſame idea of him, and upon that ground, adviſeth us to commit all our concernments to him.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptiſſima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior eſt illis homo, quam ſibi.

Leave it, ſays he, to the wiſer gods, to conſider and determine what is fitteſt for thee, and moſt for thy advantage; and though they do not always give thee what thou deſireſt, and that which pleaſeth the beſt, yet they will give that which is moſt fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himſelf. Not much different from this, is the divine counſel of Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6.

" Truſt

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" Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean " not unto thine own understanding. In all thy " ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy " paths." It is considerable who it is that gives this advice; the " wisest of the sons of men;" and yet he adviseth " to trust in GOD for direction, and not " to lean to our own understandings."

If therefore we be fully persuaded of GOD's infinitely wise and good providence, we ought certainly to refer our selves to him, and perfectly to acquiesce in his disposal, and to rest satisfied in whatever he does; and whatever condition he assigns to us, we ought to be contented with it: if we be not, we find fault with his wisdom, and reproach his goodness, and wish the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of GOD, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, so would it likewise silence all those murmurings and discontents, which are apt to arise in us, when things fall out cross to our desires, when disasters and disappointments happen to us, and the providence of GOD casts us into sickness, or poverty, or disgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befel him; " I held my peace, " (says he,) and spake not a word, because thou, " LORD, didst it." And this likewise should keep us from fretting and vexing at instruments and second causes; to consider that the wise providence of GOD over-ruleth and disposeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permission. This consideration restrained David's anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he followed him, reproaching him and cursing him; " let him alone, the LORD hath said unto him, curse " David."

" David." He considered that GOD's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from an higher hand, this calmed his passion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the street, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a passion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity soever befalleth us, when we consider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will still and hush our passion, and make us, with Eli, to hold our peace, or only to say, " it is the LORD, let him do what seemeth " him good." SERM. cxxxviii.

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and restraint, and the loss of our friends and near relations; and these are great afflictions, and very cross and distasteful to us; and therefore, when we are in danger of any of these, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befal us, we are prone to censure the providence of GOD, and to judge rashly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the best: but we should consider, that we are very ignorant and short sighted creatures, and see but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the designs of GOD, and to look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as Solomon expresseth it) " see the work of GOD from the beginning to the " end;" whereas, if we saw the whole design of providence together, we should strangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and should see it to be very wise and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the last issue and result of things,

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is most for our good, is certainly best, how grievous soever it may seem for the present. Sickness caused by physick, is, many times, more troublesom for the present, than the disease we take it for; but every wise man composeth himself to bear it as well as he can, because it is in order to his health; the evils and afflictions of this life are the physick, and means of cure, which the providence of GOD is often necessitated to make use of; and, if we did trust our selves in the hands of this great physician, we should quietly submit to all the severities of his providence, in confidence that they would "all work "together for our good."

When children are under the government of parents, or the discipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied so many things which they desire, and to be constrained by severities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the master know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconsiderateness which makes them to think so, and that when they come to years, and to understand themselves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them so much discontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childishness and folly, which made them to think otherwise, and that they had, in all probability, been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and consideration enough, to trust the discretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even those things which were so displeasing to them, would at last tend to their good.

There is a far greater distance between the wisdom of GOD and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant

ignorant and childish in respect of GOD, than our children are in respect of us; and being persuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under GOD's care and discipline, it is necessary for our good, that we be restrained in many things, which we eagerly desire: and suffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and "have put "away childish thoughts," and are come to understand things as they truly are, and not in a riddle, and darkness, as we now do; then "the judgment "of GOD will break forth as the light, and the righ- "teousness" of all his dealings "as the noon day;" then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we shall see a plain reason for all those dispensations which were so much stumbled at, and acknowledge the great wisdom and goodness of them.

You see then what reason there is to refer ourselves to the providence of GOD, and "to cast all our "care upon him," to trust him with the administration and disposal of all our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love GOD, and be careful to please him, every thing in the issue will turn to the best for us; and therefore we should not anxiously trouble ourselves about the events of things, but resign up ourselves to the good pleasure of him, who disposeth all things "according to the counsel of his "will," entirely trusting in his goodness, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us, for the best, referring the success of all our concernments to him, "in "whose hands are all the ways of the children of "men," chearfully submitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every case.

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And this is a proper expression of our confidence in GOD's wisdom and goodness, to refer things to him before the event, and to say with the Christians, Acts xxi. 14. "The will of the LORD be done;" because this shews that we are persuaded that GOD will do better for us, than our own counsel and choice; and to submit to his will after the event, is likewise a great instance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: for when GOD, by his providence, declares his will in any case, we should look upon it as the sentence of a wise and just judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Christians, who have much greater assurance of the particular providence of GOD, than the heathens had; and yet some of them were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this consideration, Epictetus, (as Arian tells us) would express himself thus, "I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which GOD wills, than that which I should will." And again, "lift up thine eyes (says he) with confidence to GOD, and say, henceforth, LORD, deal with me as thou pleasest, ὁμονοῶ σοὶ ἴσος εἰμὶ. I am of the same opinion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art; I refuse nothing that seems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; clothe me with what garments thou pleasest; set me in a publick place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty, which of these thou pleas-

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" εἰ, ἐγὼ σοὶ ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους " ἀπολογήσομαι. If men shall censure this provi- " dence towards me, and say, thou dealest hardly " with me; I will apologise for thee, I will under- " take and maintain thy cause, that what thou dost " is best for me." What could a Christian say more or better, by way of resignation of himself to the providence of GOD? It almost transports me to read such passages from an heathen, especially if we consider in what condition Epictetus was; he had a maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity of poverty, a slave, and very cruelly and tyrannically used, so that we can hardly imagine a man in worse and more wretched circumstances; and yet he justifies the providence of GOD in all this, and not only submits to his condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it; and since GOD hath thought it fittest and best for him, he is of the same mind, and thinks so too. I confess, it doth not move me to hear Seneca, who flowed with wealth, and lived at ease, to talk magnificently, and to slight poverty and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trouble: but to see this poor man, in the lowest condition, and worst circumstances of humanity, bear up so bravely, and with such a chearfulness and serenity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and this not out of stupidity, but from a wise sense of the providence of GOD, and a firm persuasion of the wisdom and goodness of all his dealings, this, who can chuse but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a Christian, much more for a heathen! To which we may apply that saying of our LORD, concerning the heathen centurion, " Verily " I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, " no, not in Israel;" so wise, so equal, so firm a temper

temper of mind is seldom to be found, no, not amongst Christians. And this is a firm consideration, that if "GOD cares for us," we and our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and therefore we should "cast all our care upon GOD." The

2. Is, because all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own spirits, and make them restless, in the contemplation of the evils and disappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miserable, in the sad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, controul the course of things, and alter the designs of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our SAVIOUR useth to this very purpose, Mat. vi. 27. "Which of you by taking "thought can add one cubit to his stature?" So that all this trouble is unreasonable, and to no purpose, because it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and disposed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate, and contrive, and use our best endeavours for the effecting of our designs, but we cannot secure the event against a thousand interpositions of divine providence. which we can neither foresee, nor hinder; but yet, notwithstanding, these our endeavours are reasonable, because they are the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miscarry, yet they are all we can do: but after this is done trouble and anxiety about the event is the vainest thing in the world, because it is to no purpose, nor doth at all conduce

conduce to what we desire; "we disquiet our selves "in vain," and we distrust GOD's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and disappoint us.

Let us then, by these considerations, be persuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and universal use in the whole course of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have used our best endeavours, let us sit down and be satisfied, and refer the rest to GOD, whose providence governs the world, and takes care of all our interests, and of the interest of his church and religion, when they seem to be in greatest danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very reasonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore understands best how to order them. The government of the world is a very curious and complicate thing, and not to be tampered with by every unskilful hand; and therefore, as an unskilful man, after he hath tampered a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at last convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it, and put it into order; so must we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concernments, or the publick state of things, we must give over governing the world, as a business past our skill, as a province too hard, and "a know-"ledge too wonderful for us," and leave it to him, who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and disposed, we do not believe the providence of GOD, whatever profession we make of it; if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious

care

care and diſcontent. Were we firmly perſuaded of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence, we ſhould confidently rely upon it, and, according to the apoſtle's advice here in the text, "caſt all "our care upon him, becauſe he careth for us."

SERMON CXXXIX.

The wiſdom of GOD in the redemption of mankind.

1 COR. i. 24.

——CHRIST, *the power of* GOD, *and the wiſdom of* GOD.

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I Have, in the ordinary courſe of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of GOD, more particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding; the knowledge and wiſdom of GOD. The firſt of theſe I have finiſhed; and made ſome progreſs in the ſecond, the wiſdom of GOD: which I have ſpoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to conſider thoſe famous inſtances and arguments of the divine wiſdom, in the creation of the world; the government of it; and the "redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST." The two firſt of theſe I have ſpoken to, namely the wiſdom of GOD, which appears in the creation and government of the world. I come now to the

III. Inſtance of the divine wiſdom, "the redemp-"tion of mankind by JESUS CHRIST;" which I ſhall

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ſhall, by GOD's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to from theſe words, "CHRIST the wiſdom of GOD."

The apoſtle, in the beginning of this epiſtle, upon occaſion of his mentioning the diviſions and parties that were among the Corinthians, where one ſaid, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" aſks them, whether "Paul was crucified for them?" or, whether "they were baptized in the name of "Paul?" To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verſes, that "he "had not ſo much as baptized any of them, except "two or three;" ſo far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verſe, he ſays, that his work, his principal work, was "to "preach the goſpel," which he had done, not with human eloquence, "not in wiſdom of words," but with great plainneſs and ſimplicity, "leſt the croſs of "CHRIST ſhould be made of none effect;" leſt, if he ſhould have uſed any artifice, the goſpel ſhould have been leſs powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the goſpel did ſeem to very many to be a fooliſh and ridiculous thing. The ſtory which they told of CHRIST crucified, was "to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to "the Greeks fooliſhneſs." The Jews, who expected another kind of Meſſias, that ſhould come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the ſtory of, "a crucified "CHRIST." The Greeks, the philoſophers, who expected ſome curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and ſimple relation of CHRIST, and of the goſpel.

But though this deſign of the goſpel appeared fil-

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ly and fooliſh to raſh and inconſiderate and prejudiced minds; yet "to them that are called," to them that do believe, "both Jews and Gentiles, CHRIST, "the power of GOD, and the wiſdom of GOD;" CHRIST, that is, the way of our redemption by JESUS CHRIST, which the apoſtle preached, "the "wiſdom of GOD," an eminent inſtance of it.

So that the "redemption of man by JESUS "CHRIST" is a deſign of admirable wiſdom. This I ſhall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general teſtimonies of ſcripture. And,

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed.

I. By teſtimonies from ſcripture. You know I have all along, in my diſcourſes of the attributes of GOD, uſed this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of ſcripture: but now I muſt forſake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wiſdom of the creation is manifeſt in "the things "which are made; the heavens declare the glory "of GOD's wiſdom, and the firmament ſhews his "handy-work." The works of GOD do preach and ſet forth the wiſdom of the creator; but the ſun, moon, and ſtars, do not preach the goſpel. The wiſdom of redemption is "wiſdom in a myſtery, "hid-"den wiſdom, which none of the princes or philoſo-"phers of this world knew." The ſharpeſt wits, and the higheſt and moſt raiſed underſtandings amongſt the heathens, could ſay nothing of this. Here "the "wiſdom of the wiſe," and the underſtanding of "the prudent" is poſed, and we may make the apoſtle's challenge, ver. 20. of this chapter, "Where "is the wiſe? where is the diſputer of this world?" There is no natural light diſcovers CHRIST; the

wiſe men cannot find him out, unleſs a ſtar be created on purpoſe to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I ſhall only depend upon divine revelation. 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. the goſpel is called "the wiſdom of "GOD in a myſtery, even the hidden wiſdom, "which GOD ordained before the world unto our "glory; which none of the princes of this world "knew." Eph. i. 7, 8. "In whom we have re-"demption through his blood, the forgiveneſs of "ſins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein "he hath abounded toward us in all wiſdom and "prudence. Eph. iii. 10, 11. "The manifold wiſdom "of GOD, according to the eternal purpoſe which "he purpoſed in CHRIST JESUS our LORD." This work of "our redemption by JESUS CHRIST" is ſo various and admirable, that it is not below the angels to know and underſtand it. "To the intent, "that unto principalities and powers in heavenly "places, might be known the manifold wiſdom "of GOD."

II. By inquiring more particularly into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed. This is wiſdom, to fit means to ends: and the more difficult the end, the greater wiſdom is required to find out ſuitable and ſufficient means for the accompliſhment of the end. Now "the wiſdom of "redemption" will appear, if we conſider the caſe of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and ſuitable means the wiſdom of GOD hath deviſed for our recovery.

Firſt, let us conſider the caſe of fallen man, which was very ſad, both in reſpect of the miſery, and the difficulty of it.

1. In reſpect of the miſery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by GOD, having by his vo-

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luntary tranſgreſſion, and wilful diſobedience, fallen from him, did preſently ſink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miſerable and curſed condition of which heaven and earth, and his own conſcience, bore him witneſs. Man being become a ſinner, is not only deprived of the image of GOD, but is liable to his juſtice; here was his miſery.

2. The difficulty of the caſe was this; man could not recover himſelf, and raiſe himſelf out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; ſo that our help is only in GOD; and, indeed, he is a merciful GOD, and doth not deſire our ruin, nor delight in our deſtruction: but ſuppoſe his mercy never ſo willing to ſave us, will not his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth check thoſe forward inclinations of his goodneſs, and hinder all the deſigns of his mercy? Is not ſin contrary to the holy nature of GOD? hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? hath not he threatned it with heavy and dreadful puniſhment? and ſaid, that "the ſinner ſhall die," that "he will "not acquit the guilty," nor "let ſin go unpuniſh-"ed?" Should he now, without any ſatisfaction to his offended juſtice, pardon the ſinner, remit his puniſhment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeable to his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth? would this become the wiſe governor of the world, who loves righteouſneſs, and order; who hates ſin, and is obliged, by the eſſential rectitude of his nature, to diſcountenance ſin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of GOD. The mercy of GOD pities our miſery, and would recover us, would open paradiſe to us: but there is a flaming ſword that keeps us out; the incenſed juſtice of GOD, that muſt be ſatisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally

nally ruined; if he spares us, how shall "mercy "and justice meet together?" how shall GOD at once express his love to the sinner, and his hatred to sin? here is the difficulty of our case. SERM. CXXXIX.

II. Let us now enquire what means the wisdom of GOD useth for our recovery. The wisdom of GOD hath devised this expedient to accommodate all these difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and justice of GOD. The son of GOD shall undertake this work, and satisfy the offended justice of GOD, and repair the ruined nature of man. He shall bring GOD and man together, make up this gulph, and renew the commerce and correspondence between GOD and us, which was broken off by sin. The work that GOD designs is the redemption of man, that is, his recovery from a state of sin and eternal death, to a state of holiness and eternal life. The son of GOD is to engage in this design of our redemption, to satisfy the offended justice of GOD towards us, so as to purchase our deliverance from the wrath to come, and so as to restore us to the image and favour of GOD, that we may be sanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will consider,

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work.

2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it.

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work, and that was the eternal son of GOD; who, in respect of his infinite wisdom and power, the dignity and credit of his person, his dearness to his father, and interest in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between GOD and man.

2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it; and these I shall refer to two heads, his humiliation,

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humiliation, and exaltation. All the parts of theſe are very ſubſervient to the deſign of our redemption.

I. The humiliation of CHRIST, which conſiſts of three principal parts; his incarnation, his life, and his death.

1. His incarnation, which is ſet forth in ſcripture by ſeveral expreſſions? his being "made fleſh, and "dwelling among us," John i. 14. His being "made of the ſeed of David according to the fleſh," Rom. i. 3. His being "made of a woman," Gal. iv. 4. The "manifeſtation of GOD in the fleſh," 1 Tim. iii. 16. His "taking part of fleſh and blood," Heb. ii. 14. His "taking on him the ſeed of A-"braham," and "being made like unto his bre-"thren," Heb. ii. 16, 17. His "coming in the "fleſh," 1 John ii. 2. All which ſignifies his tak-ing upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as GOD. The eternal ſon of GOD, in the ful-neſs of time, took our nature; that is, aſſumed a real ſoul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this perſon, who was really both GOD and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our re-demption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle perſon to interpoſe in this difference, and take up this quarrel between GOD and man. Being both GOD and man, he was concerned for both par-ties, and intereſted both in the honour of GOD, and the happineſs of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by ſuch ways as might be conſiſtent with the other.

More particularly, his incarnation did fit him for thoſe two offices which he was to perform in his hu-miliation, of prophet and prieſt.

1. The office of prophet, to teach us both by his doctrine, and his life. By

By his doctrine. His being in the likeneſs of man; this made him more familiar to us. He was "a "prophet raiſed up from among his brethren," as Moſes ſpake, and he makes this an argument why we ſhould hear him. Should GOD ſpeak to us immediately by himſelf, we "could not hear him, and "live." GOD condeſcends to us, and complies with the weakneſs of our nature, and "raiſeth up a pro-"phet from among our brethren;" we ſhould hear him. And then his being GOD, did add credit and authority to what he ſpake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his life, I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak preſently.

2. For the office of prieſt. He was fit to be our prieſt, becauſe "he was taken from among "men," as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; fit to ſuffer, as being man, having "a body prepared," as it is Heb. x. 5. and fit to ſatisfy by his ſufferings for the ſins of all men, as being GOD, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the ſufferings of an infinite perſon, being equal to the offences done againſt an infinite GOD: and thus the mercy of GOD is exalted without the diminuition of his juſtice.

And as his incarnation did qualify him for ſuffering, ſo for compaſſion, and fellow-ſuffering with us, Heb. ii. 17, 18. "Wherefore in all things it behov-"ed him to be made like unto his brethren, that he "might be a merciful and faithful high-prieſt, in "things pertaining to GOD, to make reconciliation "for the ſins of the people; for in that he himſelf "hath ſuffered, being tempted, he is able to ſuccour "them that are tempted."

2. His life was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holineſs and goodneſs. I might go through all

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all the parts of it, but because I intend to be very short upon these heads, I shall only take notice of that part of his life, which was spent in his publick ministry; "he went about doing good;" the doctrine that he preached was calculated for the destroying of sin, and the promoting of holiness; the great end and design of it was to advance righteousness, and goodness, and humility, and patience, and self-denial; to make us mortify our sensual desires, and brutish passions, to contemn and renounce this present world; and this being the design of it, it was a most proper engine to demolish the works of the devil: and to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine, the whole frame of his life, and all the circumstances of it, did contribute. His life was the practice of his doctrine, and a clear comment upon it. The meanness of his condition in the world, that he had no share of the possessions of it, were a great advantage to his doctrine of self-denial, and contempt of the world. "The captain of our salvation," that he might draw off our affections from the world, and shew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himself have no share in it, Mat. viii. 20. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air "have nests, but the son of man hath not where to "lay his head." The mean circumstances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his design; for had he not been stript of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been so free from suspicion of a worldly interest and design; nay he could not have been so considerable; he was really greater for his meanness. The very heathens did account this true greatness, (as we find in Aristotle) not to admire the pleasures, and greatness, and pomp of the world. And that his meanness might be no disadvantage

disadvantage to him, those evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him considerable, and gained more reverence and authority to his doctrine, than his meanness could bring contempt upon it. SERM. CXXXIX.

Besides, the manner of his conversation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very sweet and conversable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himself to them in the most human ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a divine testimony, and setting a seal of GOD to the truth of it; yet because many were blinded with prejudice, and though they did see, yet would not see, CHRIST "the wisdom of GOD" did so order the business of his miracles, as to make them human ways of winning upon them, for they were generally such as were beneficial; "he healed "all manner of diseases" and maladies by this miraculous power; and so his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were benefits; this was a sensible demonstration to them that he intended them good, because he did them good; they would easily believe, that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their souls. This for his life.

III. His death, which was the lowest step of his humiliation, and the consummation of his sufferings. Now the death of CHRIST did eminently contribute to this design of our redemption. The death of CHRIST did not only expiate the guilt of sin, and pacify conscience, by making plenary satisfaction to

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the divine justice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of sin in us: Rom. vi. 6. "Knowing "this, that our old man is crucified with him, that "the body of sin might be destroyed, that hence-"forth we might not serve sin." Rom. viii. 3. "GOD sending his own son in the likeness of sinful "flesh, and for sin" (that is, by being a sacrifice for sin) "condemned sin in the flesh." The death of CHRIST convinceth sin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, because the impartial justice of GOD did so severely punish it in his own son, when he appeared in the person of a sinner; and this is the most powerful argument to us to crucify sin, that it crucified our SAVIOUR. That so innocent and holy a person should suffer so cruel and ignominious a death for our sins, should set us for ever against it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of CHRIST's sufferings are with admirable wisdom fitted for the conquering of sin and Satan. Sin came by the woman: the seed of the woman suffers for sin; and by suffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our SAVIOUR began his sufferings for sin. Sin came by the tree; and CHRIST bears the curse of it in hanging upon the tree, and crucifies it by his cross.

And as he conquered sin, so he overcame Satan by his own arts. The devil found CHRIST in the likeness of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great design was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. CHRIST permits him to bring about his design: he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great stone upon it: but here his divine wisdom appears, in ruining the devil by his own design, and "snaring him in the works of his own hands;" Heb.

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Heb. ii. 14. "By death he deſtroys him that had the "power of death, that is, the devil."

I know the ſufferings of CHRIST were, by the "wiſe of the world," made the great objection againſt the wiſdom of this diſpenſation; the "croſs "of CHRIST was to the Greeks fooliſhneſs;" and yet the wiſeſt of them had determined otherwiſe in general, though not in this particular caſe. Plato (in the ſecond book of his commonwealth) ſaith, "That if a man may be a perfect pattern of juſtice "and righteouſneſs, and be approved by GOD and "men, he muſt be ſtript of all the things of this "world; he muſt be poor and diſgraced, and be "accounted a wicked and unjuſt man, he muſt be "whipt, and tormented, and crucified as a male-"factor;" which is, as it were, a prophetical deſcription of our SAVIOUR's ſufferings. And Arrian, in his epiſtle, deſcribing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls "the apoſtle, the meſſenger, "the preacher, and miniſter of GOD, ſaith, he muſt "be without houſe and harbour, and worldly accom-"dations; muſt be armed with ſuch patience for "the greateſt ſufferings, as if he were a ſtone, and "devoid of ſenſe; he muſt be a ſpectacle of miſery "and contempt to the world." So that by the acknowledgment of theſe two wiſe heathens, there was nothing in the ſufferings of CHRIST that was unbecoming the wiſdom of GOD, and improper to the end and deſign of CHRIST's coming into the world; beſides, that they ſerved a further end, which they did not dream of, "the ſatisfying of divine juſtice."

Secondly, His exaltation. The ſeveral parts of which, his reſurrection, and aſcenſion, and "ſitting "at the right hand of GOD," were eminently ſubſervient to the perfecting and carrying on of this deſign.

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The resurrection of CHRIST is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered, Rom. i. 4. "declared to be the son of GOD with power, "ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει, by the resurrection "from the dead." This great miracle of his resurrection from the dead did determine the controversy, and put it out of all doubt and question, that he was "the son of GOD." And then his ascension, and "sitting at the right hand of GOD," this gives us the assurance of a blessed immortality, and is a demonstration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlasting glory and happiness. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, than the assurance of eternal life and happiness?

And then the consequents of his exaltation, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The sending of the Holy Ghost "to lead us into all truth," to sanctify us, to assist us, and to comfort us under the greatest troubles and afflictions; and the powerful intercession of CHRIST in our behalf; and his return to judgment; the expectation whereof is the great argument to repentance, and holiness of life: Acts xvii. 30, 31. "And the times of this igno-"rance GOD winked at, but now commandeth all "men every where to repent: because he hath ap-"pointed a day, in the which he will judge the "world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath "ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto "all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." And thus I have endeavoured to prove that the "redemption of man by JESUS CHRIST" is a design of admirable wisdom.

The use I shall make of it, is to convince us of the

the unreasonableness of unbelief, and the folly and madness of impenitency.

First, The unreasonableness of unbelief. The gospel reveals to us the wise counsel and dispensation of GOD for our redemption; and those who disbelieve the gospel, "they reject the counsel of GOD "against themselves," as it is said of the unbelieving Pharisees and lawyers, Luke vii. 30. The gospel reveals to us a design so reasonable and full of wisdom, that they who can disbelieve it are desperate persons, devoted to ruin. 1 Cor. i. 18. "The "cross of CHRIST is to them that perish foolish- "ness." 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "But if our gospel be "hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the "GOD of this world hath blinded the eyes of them "that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gos- "pel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should "shine unto them." The gospel carries so much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but such whose eyes are blinded by the devil and their lusts.

He that will duly weigh and consider things, and look narrowly into this wise dispensation of GOD, shall find nothing to object against it; nay, shall discover in it the greatest motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reasonable, especially if it be for our advantage. Now this wise dispensation of GOD is not only reasonable in itself, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our understandings, and satisfy our interest; why should we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The design of the gospel is reasonable, and gratifies our understandings. And in this respect the gospel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion.

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religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holiness, and real goodness among men: and the more any religion advanceth these, the more reasonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of punishment and hopes of pardon and rewards. Now the gospel represents all these to the greatest advantage.

1. It represents the perfections of GOD to the greatest advantage, especially those which tend most to the promotion of piety, and the love of GOD in us; his justice and mercy.

(1.) His justice. The gospel represents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any case let sin go unpunished. The impartiality of the divine justice appears in this dispensation, that when GOD pardons the sinner, yet he will punish sin so severely in his own son, who was the surety. Now what could more tend to discountenance sin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His mercy. This dispensation is a great demonstration of the mercy, and goodness, and love of GOD, in sending his son to die for sinners, and in saving us by devoting and sacrificing him, John iii. 16. "For GOD so loved the world, that he gave "his only begotten son." Rom. v. 8. "But GOD "commendeth his love towards us, in that while "we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us." 1 John iv. 9, 10. "In this was manifested the love of GOD "towards us, because GOD sent his only begotten "son into the world, that we might live through "him. Herein is love; not that we loved GOD, "but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the "propitiation for our sins." Now this representation of GOD's mercy and love which the gospel makes,

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is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to GOD.

2. The second argument to piety is fear of punishment. The gospel hath revealed to us the misery of those who continue in their sin; it hath made clear and terrible discoveries of those torments which attend sinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treasures of GOD's wrath; so that now under the gospel, "hell is naked before us, and destruction "hath no covering;" and this is one thing which makes the gospel so powerful an engine to destroy sin, Rom. i. 16, 18. "The gospel is the power of "GOD unto salvation; for therein is the wrath of "GOD revealed from heaven against all ungodli-"ness, and unrighteousness of men."

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the gospel the most powerful instrument to take men off from sin, and engage them to holiness, that can be imagined. The means to draw men from sin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, is hopes of pardon and mercy; and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from sin, the gospel promises pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holiness, the gospel opens heaven to us, and sets before us everlasting glory and happiness, and gives us the greatest assurance of it.

This is the first, the design of the gospel is reasonable, in that it does eminently and directly serve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This dispensation of GOD is beneficial to us, and satisfies our interest; and this adds to the unreasonableness of our unbelief, this design of GOD

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being not only reasonable in itself, but desirable to us, that it should be so; because of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The design of the gospel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominion of sin, and the tyranny of Satan; to restore us to the image and favour of GOD; and by making us partakers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not desirable to every man, that there should be a way whereby our guilty consciences may be quieted and appeased; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell? Is it not desirable to be freed from the slavery of our lusts, and rescued from the tyranny and power of the great destroyer of souls? Is it not desirable to be like GOD, and to be assured of his love and favour, who is the best friend, and the most dangerous enemy; and to be secured, that when we leave this world, we shall be unspeakably happy for ever? Now the gospel conveys these benefits to us; and if this be the case of the gospel, and there be nothing in this design of our redemption, but what is wise and reasonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage; why should any man be so averse to the belief of it? Why should unbelief be counted a piece of wit? Is it wit to set our selves against reason, and to oppose our best interest? 'Tis wickedness, and prejudice, and inconsiderateness which disbelieves the gospel. Those who do consider things welcome this good news, and embrace these glad tidings. "Wisdom is justified of her children." To them who are truly sensible of their own interest, and willing to accept of reasonable evidence, this is not only "a true saying," but "worthy of all accepta-"tion; that CHRIST came into the world to save "sinners."

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Secondly, this doth convince men of the madneſs and folly of impenitency. Now ſince the wiſdom of GOD hath contrived ſuch a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of GOD's wrath, and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, hath given us ſuch arguments to repentance, and by diſcovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us ſuch encouragement to repentance, how great muſt the folly of impenitency be? For conſider,

1. That impenitency directly ſets itſelf againſt the "wiſdom of GOD." If after all this we continue in our ſins, "we reject the counſel of GOD againſt "our ſelves," we deſpiſe the wiſdom of GOD, and charge that with folly: and we do it againſt our ſelves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our ſins, and cheriſh our luſts, we directly oppoſe the end of our redemption, we contradict the great deſign of the goſpel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of GOD's wiſdom, who ſent his ſon into the world on purpoſe to deſtroy ſin; for we uphold that which he came to deſtroy, 1 John iii. 5. "Ye "know that he was manifeſted to take away our "ſins." Now ſhall we continue in ſin, when we know "the ſon of GOD was manifeſted to take away "ſin?" GOD cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out "the riches of his "wiſdom" in this deſign, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to GOD, and injurious to our ſelves; it is ſuch a madneſs, as if a condemned man ſhould deſpiſe a pardon; as if a priſoner ſhould be fond of his fetters, and refuſe deliverance; as if a man deſperately ſick ſhould fight with his phyſician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the "wiſdom "of GOD," who hath contrived our recovery;

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" we forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great " salvation; we love death, and hate our own souls," Prov. viii. 14, 15, 16.

2. Consider, we cannot expect " the wisdom of " GOD" shall do more for our recovery, than hath been already done; " the wisdom of GOD" will not try any further means. Mat. xxi. 37. " last of all " he sent his son." If we despise this way, if we " tread under foot the son of GOD, and count the " blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified, " an unholy thing, there will remain no more sacri- " fice for sin," Heb. x. 26, 29. What can expiate the guilt of sin, if the blood of CHRIST do not? What shall take us off from sin, what shall sanctify us, if " the blood of the covenant" be ineffectual? We resist our last remedy, and make void the best means the wisdom of GOD could devise for our recovery, if, after the revelation of the gospel, we continue in our sins.

3. If we frustrate this design of GOD's wisdom for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dreadful and certain. Impenitency under the gospel will increase our misery. " If CHRIST had not come, " we had had no sin," in comparison of what we now have; " but now our sin remains, and there is " no cloak for our sin," προφάσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν. We shall not be able at the day of judgment to preface any thing by way of excuse or apology for our impenitency. What shall we be able to say to the justice of GOD, when that shall condemn us, who rejected his wisdom, which would have saved us? We would all be saved, but we would be saved without repentance: now " the wisdom of GOD" hath not found out any other way to save us from hell, but by saving us from our sins. And thou that wilt not

ſubmit to this method of divine wiſdom, take thy courſe, and let us ſee "how thou wilt eſcape the "damnation of hell." I will conclude all with thoſe dreadful words which "the wiſdom of GOD" pronounceth againſt thoſe that deſpiſe her, and refuſe to hearken to her voice, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have "ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; "but ye have ſet at naught my counſel, and would "none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your cala-"mity, I will mock when your fear cometh." They who will not comply with the counſel of GOD for their happineſs, they ſhall inherit the condition which they have choſen to themſelves; "they ſhall "eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with "their own devices."

SERMON CXL.

The juſtice of GOD in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

GEN. xviii. 25.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

IN treating of the attributes of GOD, I have conſidered thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, viz. knowledge and wiſdom; I come now to conſider thoſe which relate to the divine will, viz. theſe four, the juſtice, the truth, the goodneſs, and the holineſs of GOD. I begin with the firſt, namely, the juſtice of GOD. SERM. CXL.

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At the 17th verſe of this chapter, GOD by a great and wonderful condeſcention of his goodneſs, reveals to Abraham his intention concerning the deſtruction of Sodom; upon this Abraham, v. 23. interceded with GOD for ſaving of the righteous perſons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with GOD his juſtice and righteouſneſs, with which he apprehended it to be inconſiſtent "to deſtroy the righteous "with the wicked," which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general deſtruction. "Wilt "thou alſo deſtroy the righteous with the wicked? "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the "city, wilt thou alſo deſtroy, and not ſpare the "place for the fifty righteous that are therein? "that be far from thee to do after this manner, to "ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the "righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far "from thee; ſhall not the judge of all the earth "do right?" This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, "ſhall not the "judge of all the earth do right?" that is, undoubtedly he will. This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments, the judge of the world will do righteouſly.

So that the argument that lies under our conſideration, is the juſtice of GOD in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments: for the clearing of which, we will conſider it,

Firſt, in hypotheſi, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in the text.

Secondly, in theſi, we will conſider it in general, in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

Firſt, we will conſider it in hypotheſi, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in

in the text; and the rather, because if we look well into it, there is something of real difficulty in it, not easy to be cleared; for Abraham's reasoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with GOD in the destruction of Sodom, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the same common destruction. "That be far "from thee to do after this manner, to slay the "righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous "should be as the wicked, that be far from thee, "shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" as if he had said, "surely the judge of all the earth "will never do so unrighteous a thing."

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And yet notwithstanding this, we see it is very usual for the providence of GOD to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no visible difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile these appearances of providence with this reasoning of Abraham in the text.

And for doing of this, I see but one possible way, and that is this, that Abraham does not here speak concerning the judgments of GOD which befal men in the ordinary course of his providence, which many times happen promiscuously, and involve good and bad men in the same ruin; and the reason hereof is plain, because GOD in his ordinary providence does permit the causes, which produce these judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either cannot or will not make any distinction; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two sorts of causes, either those which we call natural, or those which are voluntary. Natural causes, such as wind, and thunder,

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and ſtorms, and the infection of the air, and the like; theſe acting by a neceſſity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, can make no diſtinction between the good and the bad. And the voluntary cauſes of calamities, as men are, they many times will make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; nay, many times they are maliciouſly bent againſt the righteous, and the effects of their malice fall heavieſt upon them. Now we ſay that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when natural cauſes are permitted to act according to their nature, and voluntary cauſes are left to their liberty; and therefore in the courſe of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected that ſuch a diſtinction ſhould be made; it is neither poſſible, nor does juſtice require it; it is not poſſible, ſuppoſing natural cauſes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary cauſes to be left to their liberty; nor does juſtice require it, for every man is ſo much a ſinner, that no evil that befals him in this world, can be ſaid to be unjuſt in reſpect of GOD.

So that Abraham is not here to be underſtood, as ſpeaking of ſuch judgments as befal men in the ordinary courſe of GOD's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwiſe, nor is there any injuſtice in it; but Abraham here ſpeaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by GOD for the puniſhment of ſome crying ſins, and the example of the world, to deter others from the like. And ſuch was this judgment, which GOD intended to bring upon Sodom, and which Abraham hath relation to in this diſcourſe of his. In this caſe it may be expected from the juſtice of GOD, that a difference ſhould be made between the righteous and the wicked; and that for theſe reaſons: 1. Be-

SERM. CLX.

1. Because this is a judgment which GOD himself executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of it's cause, but an act of GOD, as a judge. Now it is essential to a judge to make a discrimination between the good and the bad, so as to punish the one, and spare the other; and this is as necessary to all proper acts of judgment in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a particular judgment, and the other the general judgment of the whole world.

2. When GOD goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in punishing, it may reasonably be expected that he should make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reason why he does not in his common providence is, because he will not break and interrupt the established order of things upon every little occasion: but when he does go besides the common course of things in punishing, the reason ceaseth, which hindered him before from making a difference; and it is reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a miraculous judgment, a miraculous difference should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to punish the crying sins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like sins: but if these judgments should fall promiscuously upon the righteous and the wicked, it would not be evident, that they were designed for the punishment of such sins, when men did see, that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those sins, and consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter men from sin.

Upon all these accounts you see that Abraham's reasoning

SERM. CXL.

reaſoning was very ſtrong and well grounded, as to thoſe judgments which are miraculous and extraordinary, and immediately inflicted by GOD, for the puniſhment of great and heinous ſins, which was the caſe he was ſpeaking of. And accordingly we find, that in thoſe judgments which have been immediately and miraculouſly inflicted by GOD, he hath always made this difference between the righteous and the wicked. In the deluge which he brought upon the old world, the ſpirit of GOD gives this reaſon why the judgment was ſo univerſal, becauſe "all fleſh "had corrupted his way upon the earth;" and the reaſon why he ſaved Noah and his family was, becauſe in this general corruption of mankind he alone was righteous; "thee have I ſeen righteous be-"fore me in this generation." So likewiſe in that miraculous judgment of Korah and his company, when "GOD made a new thing, and the earth o-"pened her mouth to ſwallow them up," none periſhed but he and his complices; the reſt had warning given them by GOD to "remove from the tents "of thoſe wicked men." Thus you ſee that as to the particular caſe in this text, Abraham's reaſoning concerning the juſtice of GOD is very firm, and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to diſcourſe upon, viz. to conſider the juſtice of GOD in general, in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments. And here I cannot but grant, that the beſt evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonſtrations of the power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs of GOD in this vaſt and admirable frame of things which we ſee; but we muſt ſtay till the day of judgment for a clear and full manifeſtation of the divine juſtice; for which reaſon the day of judg-

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ment is in scripture called, "the day of the revelation "of the righteous judgment of GOD." But in the mean time we may receive sufficient assurance of this, both from natural reason, and from divine revelation. SERM. CLX.

1. From natural reason, which tells us, that "GOD loves righteousness," and "hates iniquity," and consequently that it must be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to discountenance the other; that is, to give some publick testimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and dislike of the other; which cannot otherwise be done, but by rewards and punishments.

But however the heathen reasoned about this matter, whatever premises they laid, they firmly believed the conclusion, that GOD is just. Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That "GOD is in no wise unjust, but as righteous as is "possible; and that we cannot resemble GOD more, "than in this quality and disposition." So likewise Seneca tells us, "That the GOD's are neither capa- "ble of receiving an injury, nor of doing any thing "that is unjust." Antoninus the great emperor and philosopher, speaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguished by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be just, says he, you may be sure it "is so; if it be not just, you may certainly conclude "the contrary; for GOD is just, and being so, he "will do nothing that is unjust or unreasonable." And indeed the heathen philosophers looked upon this as the great sanction of all moral precepts, that GOD was the witness and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui secus faxit, Deus ipse vindex erit*; "If any man do contrary to them, GOD "himself will punish it;" which shews, that there

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is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the divine justice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2. Place, from scripture, or divine revelation. And those texts which I shall produce to this purpose, may be reduced to these two heads; either such as prove the rectitude of the divine nature and his justice in general; or such as speak more particularly of the justice and equity of his providence in the distribution of rewards and punishments. I begin, first, with those which declare the rectitude of the divine nature, and the justice of GOD in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injustice and unrighteousness, at the greatest distance from him.

1. Those which attribute this perfection to GOD. I shall mention but a few of many, Psal. cxxix. 4. "The LORD is righteous." Dan. ix. 7. "O LORD! "righteousness belongeth unto thee." This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of GOD, Ezra ix. 15. "O LORD GOD of "Israel, thou art righteous." And this the worst of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, Ex. ix. 27. then Pharaoh said, "the LORD is righteous." This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have lain under the greatest temptation to doubt of it, Jer. xii. 1. "righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with "thee: yea, let me talk with thee of thy judgment; "wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" The prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconciled with the justice of GOD's providence: yet before he would

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so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, "righteous art thou, O LORD." To this head likewise belong all those texts which speak of righteousness, as GOD's dwelling place, and his throne, of his delight in justice, and of the duration and eternity of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other texts, which remove the contrary, viz. injustice and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from GOD, as being most contrary to his nature and perfection. Deut. xxxii. 4. "A GOD of truth, and without iniquity." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our "GOD, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of gifts." Job viii. 3. "Doth GOD pervert judg- "ment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" which is a vehement negation of the thing. Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. "Far be it from GOD, that he "should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, "that he should commit iniquity. For the work "of a man shall he render unto him, and cause e- "very man to find according to his ways. Yea, "surely GOD will not do wickedly, neither will the "Almighty pervert judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness "with GOD? GOD forbid."

Secondly, there are other texts which speak more particularly of the justice and righteousness of GOD in the distribution of rewards and punishments. 'Tis true indeed, the justice of GOD doth not constantly appear in this world in the dispensations of his providence, because this is a time of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of trial and exercise to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things shall be set strait, and every man shall receive the

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juſt reward of his deeds, when the juſtice of GOD ſhall be evident to all the world, and every eye ſhall ſee it, and ſhall acknowledge the righteous judgement of GOD; and this the ſcripture moſt clearly and expreſly declares unto us; and hence it is, that the day of judgment is called "the day of the reve- "lation of the righteous judgment of GOD." The righteouſneſs of GOD doth not now ſo clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there ſhall be a day of revelation, when the righteouſneſs of GOD ſhall be made manifeſt to all the world.

The remunerative juſtice of GOD ſhall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the punitive juſtice of GOD in puniſhing the wicked and ungodly; "ſo that a man ſhall ſay, verily there is a reward "for the righteous, verily there is a GOD that judg- "eth the world."

Now the righteouſneſs of this vengeance of GOD, which GOD will take upon ſinners, is further ſet forth to us in ſcripture, from the equity and impartiality of it.

I. From the equity of it.

1. In that the ſins of men have juſtly deſerved the puniſhment, that ſhall come upon them, Rom. i. 32. "Who knowing the judgment of GOD, δικαίω- "μα τῦ θεῦ, the righteous judgment of GOD, that "they which commit ſuch things, are worthy of "death."

2. In that the judgment of GOD ſhall be proportioned to the degree and heinouſneſs of men's ſins, ſo as the leſſer or greater ſins ſhall be puniſhed with more or leſs ſeverity. So our SAVIOUR threatens to thoſe who continue impenitent under the goſpel, and the advantages of it, their caſe ſhall be more ſad than that of Tyre and Sidon, and "it ſhall be more "tolerable

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" tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of " judgment, than for them." Mat. xi. 20, 21. and Luke xii. 47, 48. There you have different degrees of punishment threatened, proportionable to the aggravations of the sins which men have committed; " The servant which knew his lord's will, and pre- " pared not himself, neither did according to his " will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he " that knew it not, but did commit things wor- " thy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;" and so proportionably of all other aggravations of sins, " for to whom much is given, of him shall " much be required; and unto whom men have " committed much, of him they will ask the more." So likewise GOD will vindicate the contempt of the gospel more severely than of the law, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the salvation offered by it greater. Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4. " If the word spoken " by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and " disobedience received a just recompence of reward, " how shall we escape?" &c. And so, Heb. x. 28, 29. " He that despised Moses his law, died with- " out mercy under two or three witnesses, of how " much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be " thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot " the son of GOD?" &c.

II. The righteousness of this judgment is further set forth to us in scripture by the impartiality of it. Hither belong all those texts, which remove from GOD that προσωπολημψία, that respect of persons, which is so incident to human tribunals. Now respect of persons is in distribution of justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon account of those circumstances,

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to deal unequally with those, whose case is equal; as when two persons, who are equally guilty of a crime, are brought to their trial, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendship, or relation, or some other interest, because one is poor and the other rich, the one hath powerful friends to intercede for him, the other not, the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not, or upon any other account, besides the pure merits of the cause; I say to deal thus in the distribution of justice, is respect of persons. Otherwise in matters of mere grace and favour respect of persons hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, προσωποληψία *locum non habet in gratuitis, sed in debitis.* Now this the scripture every where speaks of, as a thing very far from GOD, Deut. x. 17. "The LORD your GOD is the GOD of gods, and "LORD of lords, a great GOD, a mighty and a "terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh "rewards." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no ini-"quity with the LORD our GOD, nor respect of "persons, nor taking of gifts." Job xxxiv. 18, 19. "Is it fit to say to a king, thou art wicked? or to "princes, ye are ungodly? how much less to him that "accepteth not the person of princes, nor regard-"eth the rich more than the poor? for they are all "the work of his hands." Rom. ii. 6. "Who will "render to every man according to his deeds: for "there is no respect of persons with GOD." Acts x. 34, 35. "of a truth I perceive that GOD is no re-"specter of persons: but in every nation he that "feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accept-"ed with him." Eph. vi. 8, 9. The apostle there presseth the duties of servants to masters, from this consideration, that "whatsoever good thing any

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" man doth, the same shall he receive of the LORD, " whether he be bond or free;" and at the 9th ver. " Ye masters, do the same thing unto them, for- " bearing threatening; knowing that your master " also is in heaven, neither is there respect of per- " sons with him." He maketh this likewise an argument, why men should not oppress and deal deceitfully one with another, Col. iii. 25. " But he " that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong " which he hath done; and there is no respect of " persons." And in general, St. Peter urgeth this consideration upon all men to deter them from sin in any kind, 1 Pet. i. 17. " And if ye call on the fa- " ther, who without respect of persons judgeth ac- " cording to every man's work, pass the time of " your sojourning here in fear.

And besides that the scripture doth remove this at the greatest distance from GOD, it gives us also several instances of the impartiality of the divine justice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aside by any of those extrinsecal considerations which commonly sway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and entreaties, Mat. vii. 21, 22. " Not every one that saith unto me LORD, LORD, " shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that " doth the will of my father which is in heaven," &c. The divine justice is not to be imposed upon by good words, and external shews, and false professions; so neither by any external relation to him; " for many shall come from the east, and from " the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, " and Jacob, in the kingdom of GOD, but the " children of the kingdom shall be cast out into ut- " ter darkness."

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And however men may bear up themselves now upon their worldly greatness and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greatest persons in the world, those who overturn kingdoms, and lay waste countries, and oppress and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own lusts and ambition, I say there is a day a coming, when even these, as much, nay, more than others, shall fear and tremble before the impartial justice of GOD. Rev. vi. 15. "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, "and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the "mighty men, and every bond-man and every free-"man shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the "rocks of the mountains; for the great day of his "wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" The impartial justice of GOD will treat the greatest and the meanest persons alike, Rev. xx. 12. "I saw "the dead, small and great, stand before GOD; "and the books were opened, and another book "was opened, which is the book of life; and the "dead were judged out of those things which were "written in the books according to their works." All judged "according to their works."

I should next proceed to vindicate the justice of GOD in the distribution of rewards and punishments from those objections, which seem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the world, and that is, how far justice, especially as to the punishment of offenders, is essential to GOD? And for the clearing of this matter, I shall briefly lay down these propositions.

First, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every perfection is essential to GOD, and cannot be imagined to be separated from the divine nature,

nature, because this is the natural notion which men have of GOD, that he is a being that hath all perfection. SERM. CXL.

Secondly, the actual constant exercise of those divine perfections, the effects whereof are without himself, is not essential to GOD. For instance, though GOD be essentially powerful and good, yet it is not necessary, that he should always exercise his power and goodness, but at such times, and in such a manner, as seems best to his wisdom; and this is likewise true of his wisdom and justice, because these are perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon something without himself.

Thirdly, it is essential to GOD to love goodness, and hate sin, wherever he sees them. It is not necessary there should be a world, or reasonable creatures in it: but upon supposition that GOD makes such creatures, it is agreeable to the divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to discourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by rewards and punishments; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the divine nature, to reward goodness, and to punish sin.

Fourthly, as for those rewards which the gospel promiseth, and the punishments which it threatens, there is some difference to be made between the rewarding and punishing justice of GOD.

1. As for that abundant reward GOD is pleased to promise to good men, the promise of it is founded in his goodness; and the performance of that promise, in his justice; for it is justice to perform what he promises, though the promise of so great and abundant a reward was mere goodness.

2. As for the punishing justice of GOD, about

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which hath been the great queſtion, whether that be eſſential to GOD or not, it ſeems very plain, that it is not neceſſary that GOD ſhould inflict thoſe judgments which he threatens, becauſe he hath threatened them; for there is not the like obligation upon perſons to perform their threatnings, that there is to perform their promiſes; becauſe GOD by his promiſe becomes a debtor to thoſe to whom he makes the promiſe; but when he threatens, he is the creditor, and we are debtors to his juſtice; and as a creditor, he may remit the puniſhment which he hath threatened: but then if we conſider GOD as loving goodneſs and hating ſin; if we look upon him as governor of the world, and concerned to preſerve good order, to encourage holineſs and righteouſneſs, and to diſcountenance ſin, under this conſideration it is eſſential to him to puniſh ſin at ſuch times, and in ſuch manner and circumſtances, as ſeems beſt to his wiſdom.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by ſome learned men to the contrary, that if puniſhing juſtice were eſſential to GOD, then he muſt puniſh the ſinner immediately, ſo ſoon as he hath offended, and to the utmoſt of his power; becauſe whatever acts naturally, acts neceſſarily, and to the utmoſt: for I do not ſuppoſe ſuch a juſtice eſſential to GOD as acts neceſſarily, but ſuch a juſtice, which as to the time, and manner, and circumſtances of it's acting, is regulated and determined by his wiſdom; and there is the ſame reaſon likewiſe of his goodneſs.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the diſpenſations of GOD in this world; and partly from the puniſhments of the other.

Firſt, as to the diſpenſations of GOD in this world,

there are these two things objected against the justice of the divine providence.

I. The inequality of GOD's dealing with good and bad men in this world.

II. The translation of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another, as the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection, the inequality of GOD's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things happen promiscuously, "there is one event to "the righteous, and to the wicked;" if the wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the righteous; if the righteous sometimes flourish, so do the wicked: and is not this unjust, that those who are so unequal as to their deserts, should be equally dealt withal? Or if there be any inequality, it is usually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, prosper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old against the providence of GOD, which the heathen philosophers took so much pains to answer, nay, it did often shake the faith of holy and good men in the old testament. Job xii. 6. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, "and they that provoke GOD are secure; into whose "hand GOD bringeth abundantly;" and chap. xxi. 7, 8, 9. he expostulates the same matter again: and David says, this was a great stumbling-block to him, Psal. lxxiii. 2, 3. and the like we find in the prophets, Jer. xii. 1. and Hab. i. 13. This objection I have elsewhere considered, I shall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to justice to shew itself immediately, and to dispense

rewards and punishments so soon as there are objects for them. This is not thought necessary among men; much more ought we to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine the time and circumstances of the exercising of his justice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjust, if he do not bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, just when we think he should.

2. If God intended this life for a state of trial, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reasonable to expect that he should follow men with present rewards and punishments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, so that there would hardly be any opportunity of trying them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reason in the world to presume that God should exercise the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad men to take their course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them, so often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men shall be judged "according to their works," then this objection vanisheth; for that great day will set all things strait, which seem now to be so crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and punishments to the most convenient season, is so far from being a reflection upon the justice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What Claudian says of Ruffinus, a very bad man, whose long impunity had tempted men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this case;

Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,
Absolvitque deos.

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" The punishment which overtook him at last, " did quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and absolv- " ed the gods from all blame." When men look but a little way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit GOD in their thoughts from all those imputations of injustice which, from the inequality of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are to charge him withal.

II. Objection, from the translation of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of " the fathers upon the children," which GOD threatens in the second commandment, and did, in some sort, fulfil in Ahab, in " bringing the evil he had " threatened him withal, in his son's days," 1 Kings xxi. 19. The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of Achan upon the whole congregation, Josh. xxii. 20. " Did not Achan the son of " Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, " and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? " and that man perished not alone in his iniquity." And the sin of David upon the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. When seventy thousand died of the plague, for David's sin in numbering the people. Now how is this agreeable to justice? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput sequitur?* " mischief pursues the sinner?" What can be more reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant authores?* " Than that mens faults should be charg- " ed upon the authors," and punishment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this,

1. It is not unreasonable that one man should bear the

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the punishment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it, *volenti non fit injuria*; "There "is no wrong done to those that are willing to un- "dergo it," though they be innocent; which was the case of our blessed SAVIOUR suffering for us, "the just for the unjust," as the scripture expresseth it.

2. Where the person, upon whom the punishment is transferred, is likewise a sinner, and obnoxious to GOD, there can be no injustice; because he hath deserved it upon his own account, and GOD may take what occasion he pleaseth to punish them that deserve to be punished.

3. In punishing "the iniquity of the father upon "the children," the guilty person, that is, the father, is punished in the calamity of his children; for a man's children are himself multiplied; and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the second commandment, GOD promiseth "to shew mercy to "thousands of generations of them that love him; "but he visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the "children, but to the third and fourth generation," that is, so far as man may live to see them punished, and suffer in their punishment.

4. As to the punishment of the people for the sins of their princes and governors, and one part of a community for another, supposing all of them to be sinners, which is the true case, GOD may lay the punishment where he pleaseth; and there is no more injustice than when a man is whipt on the back for the theft which his hand committed, a community being one body: besides, the prince is punished in the loss of his people, the glory of a king consisting in the multitude of his subjects.

The objection with respect to the other world,

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the punishment of temporal evils with eternal, is elsewhere answered.

The use we should make of this whole discourse is,

First, If GOD be just and righteous, let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the reason whereof is most hidden and obscure: Neh. ix. 33. speaking of the great afflictions that had befallen GOD's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, "howbeit, thou art just in all that "is brought upon us."

Secondly, this is matter of terror to wicked men. GOD doth now exercise his milder attributes towards sinners, his mercy, and patience, and goodness: but if we despise these, that terrible attribute of his justice will display itself; and this the scripture describes in a severe manner; "the LORD revengeth, and is "jealous; the LORD will take vengeance on his ad-"versaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies."

Thirdly, this is matter of comfort to good men, that the righteous GOD governs the world, and will judge it: "the LORD reigneth, let the earth re-"joice," Psal. xcvii. 1. And he gives the reason of it in the next verse; "righteousness and judgment "are the habitation of his throne." Though he be omnipotent, we need not fear; for his power is always under the conduct of eternal righteousness.

Fourthly, let us imitate this righteousness; let us endeavour "to be righteous as he is righteous;" let us give to GOD the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is just and due to men. This duty hath an immutable reason, founded in the nature of GOD.

SER-

SERMON CXLI.

The truth of GOD.

DEUT. xxxii. 4.

—*A* GOD *of truth.*

SERM. CXLI.

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall

I. Shew you what we are to underſtand by the truth of GOD.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to GOD, that he is "a GOD of truth."

III. Anſwer ſome objections that may be made againſt it; and then make ſome uſe of it.

I. What we are to underſtand by the truth of GOD. I ſhall take it as the ſcripture uſeth it in a large ſenſe, ſo as to include not only the veracity of GOD, but his faithfulneſs. Hence it is that, in ſcripture, truth and faithfulneſs are ſo often put together, and frequently put one for another: Iſa. xxv. 1. "Thy "counſels of old are faithfulneſs and truth." Rev. xxi. 1. "Theſe words are true and faithful." And the faithfulneſs of GOD, in performing his promiſes, is frequently called his truth. And becauſe the ſcripture uſeth them promiſcuouſly, we need not be very ſolicitous to find out diſtinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be diſtinguiſhed thus: the truth or veracity of GOD hath place in every declaration of his mind; the faithfulneſs of GOD, only in his promiſes.

For the firſt, the veracity or truth of GOD; this hath place in every declaration of his mind; and ſignifies an exact correſpondence and conformity between

tween his word and his mind, and consequently between his word and the truth and reality of things. The correspondence of his word with his mind, depends upon the rectitude of his will; the conformity of his word with the reality of things, not only upon the rectitude of his will, but the perfection of his knowledge, and the infallibility of his understanding: so that when we say GOD is true, or speaks truth, we mean thus, that his words are a plain declaration of his mind, and the true representation of things, in opposition to falshood, which is speaking otherwise than the thing is; and hypocrisy, that is, speaking otherwise than we think. For instance, when GOD declares any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus; the thing really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any thing, he does really desire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we should do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretels any thing future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the declaration be to be understood conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, the faithfulness of GOD. This only hath place in his promises, in which there is an obligation of justice superadded to his word; for GOD, by his promise, doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his promise would not only cast an imputaion upon his truth, but upon his justice.

II. That this perfection belongs to GOD. And this I shall endeavour to prove,

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Firſt, from the dictates of natural light.

Secondly, from ſcripture.

Firſt, from the dictates of natural light. Natural light tells us, that truth and faithfulneſs are perfections, and conſequently belong to the divine nature; and that falſhood and a lie are imperfections, and to be removed from GOD. There is nothing that is eſteemed amongſt men a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a man the lie, to call him a liar, becauſe it is an argument of ſo much baſeneſs, and of a low, and mean, and ſervile ſpirit; the uſual temptation to it being fear of loſing ſome advantage, or incurring ſome danger. Hence was that ſaying, that "it is the property of a ſlave to lie, but "of a free man to ſpeak truth:" now, whatever argues baſeneſs or imperfection, our reaſon tells us is infinitely to be ſeparated from the moſt perfect being. "GOD cannot be tempted with evil," the divine nature being all-ſufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the ſecurity of it's fulneſs and all-ſufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increaſe, nor fear any impairment of it's eſtate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either becauſe they are raſh and inconſiderate in paſſing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconſtant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of theſe are incident to GOD; his infinite wiſdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foreſight of all events, ſecure him both from inconſiderateneſs, and inconſtancy, and forgetfulneſs; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath ſpoken, and to make good his word. And that theſe are the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of our minds, appears clearly from the reaſoning of the heathens

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in this matter, who were deſtitute of divine revelation. Plato de repub. l. 2. lays down this as a certain truth, "that lying and falſhood are imperfections, and odious to GOD and men; τὸ μὲν ψεῦδος ἐκ μόνον ἀπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται." And afterwards he tells us, "that the "divine nature is free from all temptations hereto, "either from advantage or fear; ἐκ ἄρ' ἔστιν ἕ ἕνεκα ἂν θεὸς ψεύδοιτο; πάντη ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον;" and concludes, "therefore GOD is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his words and actions, and is "neither changed himſelf, nor deceives us." Porphyry, in the life of Pythagoras, tells us, "that this "was one of his precepts, μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τὰς ἀνθρώπους ποιεῖν θεῷ παραπλησίας; and afterwards he adds, "that "truth is ſo great a perfection, that if GOD would "render himſelf viſible to men, he would chuſe light "for his body, and truth for his ſoul.

Secondly, from ſcripture. The ſcripture doth very frequently attribute this to GOD, 2 Sam. vii. 28. "And now, O LORD GOD, thou art that GOD, and "thy words be true." Pſal. xxv. 10. "All the "paths of the LORD are mercy and truth. Pſal. xxxi. 5. "Into thine hand I commit my ſpirit; thou "haſt redeemed me, O LORD GOD of truth." Rev. iii. 7. "Theſe things ſaith he that is holy, he that "is true." Rev. vi. 10. "How long, O LORD, "holy and true?" xv. 3." "Juſt and true are thy "ways, thou king of ſaints." xvi. 7. "True and "righteous are thy judgments." Hither we may refer thoſe texts which ſpeak of the plenty and abundance of GOD's truth: Ex. xxxiv. 6. "Abundant "in goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. "Plenteous in mercy and truth;" and thoſe which

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ſpeak of the duration and eternity of it: Pſal. c. 5. "And his truth endureth to all generations." cxvii. 2. "And the truth of the LORD endureth for ever." cxlvi. 6. "Who keepeth truth for "ever."

As the ſcripture doth attribute this perfection to GOD, ſo it removes the contrary from him with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation: Num. xxiii. 19. "GOD is not a man, that he ſhould lie, neither the "ſon of man, that he ſhould repent: hath he ſaid, "and ſhall not he do it? or hath he ſpoken, and "ſhall he not make it good?" They are Balaam's words, but GOD put them into his mouth. 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie, nor "repent: for he is not a man that he ſhould re-"pent." Rom. iii. 4. "Yea let GOD be true, and "every man a liar." Nay, the ſcripture goes further; does not only remove lying, and falſhood, and inconſtancy from GOD, but ſpeaks of theſe as things impoſſible to the divine nature: Tit. i. 2. "In "hope of eternal life, which GOD that cannot lie, "promiſed before the world began." Heb. vi. 18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was im-"poſſible for GOD to lie, we might have a ſtrong "conſolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold "upon the hope ſet before us."

And the ſcripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to GOD, but doth more particularly aſſure us of his ſincerity and truth and faithfulneſs. Of his ſincerity; that he deals plainly with us, and ſpeaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true repreſentation of his mind. GOD is very careful to remove this jealouſy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of GOD, as if notwithſtanding all

all that he hath declared, he had a secret design to ruin men; therefore he interposeth his oath for our greater assurance, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "As I live, saith "the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death "of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his "way, and live." When GOD speaks to us, he speaks his mind, and hath no design to circumvent and possess us with error and delusion: if he offer life and happiness, we may believe he is real; and that if he did not intend to bestow it upon us, or if there were no such thing as a future glory, he would not have declared it to us; this was the temper of our SAVIOUR, who was "the express image of the "Father, full of grace and truth." John xiv. 2. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it "were not so, I would have told you." SERM. CXLI.

And as the scripture assures us of his sincerity, so of his truth and faithfulness in the accomplishment of all his predictions, and performances of all his promises. As for the truth of his predictions, and certain accomplishment of them, the scripture frequently useth this proverbial speech, to assure us of the certainty of their accomplishment; "Heaven "and earth shall pass away, but my words shall "not pass away." Mat. xxiv. 35. For the faithfulness of GOD in his promises, the scripture makes frequent mention of it: Deut. vii. 9. "Know there-"fore that the LORD thy GOD, he is GOD, the "faithful GOD, which keepeth covenant and mer-"cy." Psal. lxxxix. 33, 34. "I will not suffer "my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not "break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my "lips." The scripture doth record GOD's punctual and full performance of his promises, particularly of that promise to Abraham, after four hundred years,

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years, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, "and to give them the Land of Canaan for an inheritance," Gen. xv. 13. the punctual accomplishment you have recorded Ex. xii. 41. "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt." See likewise Jos. xxi. 44, 45. and xxiii. 14. 1 Kings viii. 56. And upon this account it is that GOD is so frequently in scripture styled "the GOD that keepeth covenant," 1 Kings viii. 23. Neh. i. 5. ix. 32. and in several other places. And so likewise of predictions of evil to come, GOD is true in fulfilling his word, 1 Sam. xv. 29. When the prophet had threatened Saul to rent the kingdom from him, he adds, "the strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent."

III. I come to remove some objections that may be made against the truth and faithfulness of GOD.

First, It is objected against the sincerity of GOD, and his plain dealing, that he is sometimes represented in scripture, as inspiring prophets with false messages, 1 Kings xxii. 20, &c. Jer. iv. 10. xx. 7. Ezek. xiv. 9.

Ans. As to three of these texts, it is a known Hebraism to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively. So where "the devils besought CHRIST, that he would suffer them to enter into the herd of swine, he said unto them, go," Mat. viii. 31. He did not command, but permit them. And so John xiii. 27. where our SAVIOUR says to Judas, "what thou dost, do quickly;" we are not to understand, that he commanded him to betray him, though that seem

seem to be expressed in the form. So likewise here, where an evil spirit offered himself to be "a lying "spirit in the mouth of the prophet:" and GOD says, "go forth, and do so; this only signifies a permission, not a command. And so Jer. iv. 10. where the prophet complains that GOD had greatly deceived the people, "saying, they should have peace, "when the sword reached to the soul;" we are to understand this no otherwise, but that GOD permitted the false prophets to deceive them, propheſying peace to them; as appears by the history. Ezek. xiv. 9. "I the LORD have deceived that prophet," that is, permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people," as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity, with respect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse; "I will take the "house of Israel in their own heart, because they are "all estranged from me through their idols;" because they have chosen to themselves false gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets: and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, "and I will stretch my hand upon him, and "I will destroy him from the midst of the people. Now GOD will not punish that whereof he is the author.

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That text, Jer. xx. 7. "Thou hast deceived me, "and I was deceived," signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the promise of GOD to him, who when he gave him his commission, told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and "now he was be-"come a derision, and the people mocked him;" and in his passion and weakness he breaks forth into this expression, "thou hast deceived me, and I was "deceived," whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning

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meaning of GOD's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first chapter.

Second objection against the faithfulness of GOD as to performance of his promise. It is objected, that GOD did not give the children of Israel all the land which he promised to Abraham; as will appear by comparing Gen. xviii. 19, 20. with Josh. xiii. 1. &c. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. Gen. xv. 18. GOD promised to give Abraham and his seed such a land, the bounds whereof he describes Josh. xiii. 1. 'Tis said there, that "there remained very much land" yet unconquered, which they had not got the possession of. And Judg. ii. 20. it is said, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, GOD would suspend the farther performance of his promise, and would not drive out any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the Israelites never were possessed of the promised land in the full latitude and extent of the promise.

Ans. This covenant of GOD with Abraham, was upon consideration of his past faith and obedience, though it seems the full performance of it did likewise depend upon the future obedience of his posterity; in pursuance of this covenant, notwithstanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, GOD did bring them into the promised land, though "they provoked him to destroy them many a time; "because he remembred his covenant with Abra- "ham;" when they were possessed of it, GOD gave them a title to the rest, and would have assisted them in the conquest of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him: but they did not,

and

and thereby discharged GOD from any further performance of his promise; and GOD, when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with Abraham, so far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of Joshua, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, Josh. xxi. 44. and of Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 56. yea, and had it not been that GOD had made this covenant, as well upon consideration of Abraham's faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his posterity, the rebellions and disobedience of the people in the wilderness had released GOD wholly from the promise; and he had not been unfaithful if "he had destroyed utterly that people, "and made a full end of them," and they had never entred into that land; because a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to cease: and that this condition was implied in this covenant with Abraham, appears by these texts, Deut. vii. 12, 13. xi. 22, 23, 32. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. GOD gives this reason why he suspended the complete performance of his promise; "The anger of the LORD was hot "against Israel, and he said, Because that this peo-"ple hath transgressed my covenant which I com-"manded their fathers, and have not hearkened to "my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out "any from before them, of the nations which Jo-"shua left when he died."

Third objection: GOD is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as when he threatened Adam, Gen. ii. 17. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou "shalt surely die;" which yet was not accomplished, for he lived many hundred years after. GOD threatened Ahab "to bring evil upon him and his "family," 1 Kings xxi. 21. But, upon his humili-

ation, he is pleased to respite it, ver. 29. So GOD threatned Hezekiah with death, but, upon his prayer, "adds fifteen years to his life." 2 Kings xx. Thus Nineveh was threatened, but, upon their repentance, "GOD repented of the evil," Jon. iii. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment consistent with the truth of GOD? doth not this seem to charge him with falshood or levity?

Ans. This may be said in general, that every one that understands the nature of GOD, cannot but be very well assured, that falshood and levity are very far from GOD; and though he could not untie some particular knots, and answer all difficulties, yet he ought to rest satisfied in this assurance. I confess this objection is troublesom, and requires a distinct consideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I shall, with submission, offer these things in answer to it.

1. As for the expression of GOD's repenting, we are to understand it, as many others in scripture, after the manner of men, and spoken by way of condescension to our weakness, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as casting any imputation of falshood or inconstancy upon GOD, as if either he did not intend what he saith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When GOD is said to repent, the expression only signifies thus much, that GOD doth not execute that which seemed to us to have been his purpose, that he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatenings seemed openly to express, because of some tacit condition implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the truth, or sincerity, or constancy of GOD, in his word. Not from his truth; for he speaks what he intends really, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened; upon

upon which he was resolved, when he threatened, to be taken off, and stop his judgments: nor doth it derogate from his sincerity and plainness; for he hath told us that his threatenings have such conditions implied in them: nor doth it derogate from the constancy and immutability of GOD; because GOD doth not *mutare consilium, sed sententiam*; he doth not change his counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence, which he had passed with reserved conditions. SERM. CXLI.

2. As to the instances, that I may give more particular satisfaction to them, I shall consider the threatenings of GOD with this double respect, either with relation to a law, or with relation to the event; with relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it; or with relation to the event, as they are predictions of something to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it. And thus considered, they differ from promises; for promises confer a right, *omne promissum cadit in debitum*; but a threatening doth not convey any right, nor, if forborn, can the party complain of wrong done to him; and therefore, in this case, it can only signify what the offence against the law deserves, and what the offender may expect; for the end of threatening is not punishment, but the avoiding of it. And this may answer the first instance. GOD gave Adam a law; and, by way of sanction, not of prediction of an event, he threatened the breach of it with death: now GOD did not execute the punishment threatened at the time threatened, but deferred it, and this without any impeachment of his justice or truth, because this threatening was only the sanction of the law.

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(2.) We may consider threatenings with relation to the event, and as predictions; and as to the accomplishment of these, there seems to be a greater degree of necessity, because the honour of GOD's knowledge, and power, and truth seem to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, it must either be for want of knowledge to foresee events, or power to bring them to pass, or constancy to his word. Now if we consider threatenings with respect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other instances may be satisfied, by laying down this rule for the understanding of them, viz. "That all prophetical threatenings or predictions of judgments are to be understood with this tacit condition, if there do not intervene the humiliation, and repentance, and prayer of the persons against whom the judgment is threatened; and if so, GOD may, upon repentance, without any impeachment of the honour of his truth, or knowledge, or power, either defer, or abate, or remit the punishment." And that the predictions of judgments are to be understood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, to make some use of this doctrine.

First, If GOD be a "GOD of truth," then this gives us assurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not false; but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and mistake. Were it not for the veracity of GOD, we might, for any thing we know, be under a constant delusion; and no man could demonstrate the contrary, but that this is our make, and our temper, and the very frame of our understand-

derſtandings, to be then moſt of all deceived, when we think our ſelves to be moſt certain; I ſay, no man could be aſſured of the contrary, but from hence, becauſe veracity and truth is a divine perfection; and therefore God cannot be the author of error and deluſion. Therefore we may be aſſured, that the frame of our underſtanding is not a cheat, but that our faculties, are true, and unleſs it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are neceſſary to our happineſs. SERM. CXLI.

Secondly, If God be "a God of truth," then there is reaſon why we ſhould believe and aſſent to whatever we are ſatisfied is revealed to us by God. A divine revelation is a ſufficient ground for the moſt firm aſſent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the higheſt evidence, and ought to give us the moſt firm aſſurance of the truth of it. Hence it is, that the word of God is called "the word of truth," yea, and "truth itſelf," John xvii. 17. "Thy word is truth."

Therefore whoever entertains the ſcriptures as the word of God, and is ſatisfied of the divine authority of them, ought, in reaſon, to believe every thing contained in them, yea, though there be ſome things of which no reaſonable account can be given, and which our reaſon and underſtanding cannot give us particular ſatisfaction in; yet, becauſe we are ſatisfied that they are revealed by God, "who cannot "lie," whoſe knowledge is infallible, and whoſe word is true, we ought, upon this higher and ſuperior reaſon, to yield a firm aſſent to the truth of them: if we do not, we diſhonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this eſſential property, his veracity. 1 John v. 10. "he that believeth on the ſon of God, "hath the witneſs in himſelf: he that believeth not "God,

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"GOD, hath made him a liar, because he believeth "not the record that GOD gave of his son." As, on the other hand, if we do believe what GOD hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and set our seal to his veracity. So it is said of Abraham, Rom. iv. 20. That "he was strong in faith, giving "glory to GOD." And St. John the baptist, speaking concerning our SAVIOUR, saith, John iii. 33. "He "that hath received his testimony, hath set to his "seal, that GOD is true."

Thirdly, if GOD be "a GOD of truth," and faithful in performing his promise, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and trust. If GOD have made any promise, we may securely rely upon it, that it shall be made good; we may "hold fast" our hope "without wavering, because he is faithful who hath "promised," Heb. x. 23. Hence it is that the blessings of GOD's covenant are called "sure mer-"cies," Isa. lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithful friend, and look upon the promise of an honest man as very good security; but men may fail us when we rely upon them: but "GOD is true," though "all men "should prove liars." Men are fickle and mutable; but the nature of GOD is fixed, he cannot fail those that trust in him. When GOD hath made any promise to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulness. So we find David did, 2 Sam. vii. 25, &c.

Only we should be careful to perform the condition which is required on our part, Heb. iv. 1. we should "take heed, lest a promise being left us, any "one should come short of it," by not performing the condition; for that doth release and discharge him of the promise; and he is faithful, though he

doth

doth not perform what he promiſed, becauſe he did not promiſe, but upon condition: and this ſeems to be the meaning of thoſe words, 2 Tim. ii. 13. "If "we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot "denyhimſelf." He ſaid before, that if we perform the conditions required, GOD will beſtow the bleſſings promiſed: "it is a faithful ſaying; for if "we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; "if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: but if "we deny him," the curſe threatened will then take place, and "he will deny us," and GOD is not unfaithful in doing this, he does not deny himſelf.

Now if we have ſuch aſſurance, we may truſt him with our greateſt concernments, and venture our ſouls with him: Pſal. xxxi. 5. "Into thine hand I "commit my ſpirit; thou haſt redeemed me, O "LORD GOD of truth. We ſhould rely upon him, when there are the greateſt improbabilities of the accompliſhment of his promiſes. Thus did Abraham, Rom. iv. 17, &c.

This ſhould make us alſo "patient in hope:" if a promiſe be not ſpeedily accompliſhed, we ſhould not be dejected or diſquieted. David challengeth himſelf upon this account, Pſal. xlii. 11. "Why "art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou "diſquieted within me? Hope thou in GOD; for I "ſhall yet praiſe him, who is the health of my coun-"tenance, and my GOD."

Fourthly, the truth of GOD is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may juſtly be expected, becauſe their ſins deſerve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canſt reaſonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of humiliation and repentance; and if, notwithſtanding theſe

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threatenings, thou continueſt in thy ſins, and "bleſſeſt thy ſelf, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though "thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart;" by this very thing thou provokeſt the juſtice of GOD, "not to ſpare thee," and makeſt "his wrath and "his jealouſy to ſmoke againſt thee;" and if thou continueſt impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his truth and veracity is concerned to inflict eternal puniſhments upon thee; for "he hath ſworn in his wrath," that ſuch "ſhall "not enter into his reſt."

Fifthly, let us propound to ourſelves the truth of GOD for our pattern and imitation, would you be like GOD? be true and faithful. Truth and faithfulneſs are divine perfections; but lying and falſhood are the properties of the devil, and the predominant qualities of hell. The character of the devil is, that "he abode not in the truth, and there is no "truth in him; when he ſpeaketh a lie, it is of his "own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." John viii. 44.

One of the moſt natural notions that we have of religionis, that it is to imitate GOD, and to endeavour to be like him, ſo far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections, is the higheſt ſin; becauſe it is againſt the cleareſt dictates of our mind, and contrary to thoſe principles which are moſt deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, falſe and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt; becauſe theſe ſins are contrary to the chiefeſt and moſt eſſential perfections of GOD. Lying is a ſin that would fly in the face of an heathen, becauſe it directly contradicts thoſe natural notions which every man hath of GOD and religion; therefore we find that

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there is hardly any thing that men are more ashamed of, than to be taken in a lie, and it is esteemed the highest reproach to be charged with it; it argues such a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, "the nature of GOD," and consequently so much imperfection and baseness; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards GOD, and base towards men.

Upon these accounts GOD expresseth himself highly offended with those that practise lying and falshood, and to have a detestation of them; Prov. xii. 22. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD." It renders us unlike to him; Eph. iv. 24, 25. "Put "on the new man, which after GOD is created in "righteousness and true holiness (or in the holiness "of truth.") And from hence he infers, "where"fore putting away lying, speak every man truth "to his neighbour: for we are members one of "another." Col. iii. 9, 10. "Lie not one to an"other, seeing that ye have put off the old man "with his deeds; and have put on the new man, "which is renewed in knowledge, after the image "of him that created him:" that is, because we profess to be conformed to the image of GOD. More particularly, we should charge our selves with truth and faithfulness towards GOD and men.

1. Towards GOD, in our oaths, and vows, and covenants. In our oaths, when we swear in any matter, we tell GOD that what we speak is truth, and invoke him to bear witness to it. To falsify in an oath is one of the most solemn affronts that we can put upon the GOD of truth.

And so in our vows, which are a solemn promise to GOD, of such things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth

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truth will neither be rash in making a vow, nor careless to perform it. Eccles. v. 4. "When thou "voweſt a vow to GOD, defer not to pay it, for he "hath no pleaſure in fools." Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either of raſhneſs in the making of it, or of inconſtancy in not keeping it.

So likewiſe in all our covenants with GOD, to ſerve him and obey him, and keep his commandments, we ſhould directly charge our ſelves with performance of theſe. There is a natural obligation upon us to theſe things from the very law of our creation, though we ſhould never ſolemnly make any ſuch promiſe, nor enter into any ſuch engagements, becauſe it is a tacit condition of our beings: but the taking of this covenant ſolemnly upon us in baptiſm, ſtrengthens the obligation, and makes our unfaithfulneſs the greater ſin. All our hopes of happineſs are founded in the faithfulneſs of GOD; and if thou be falſe to him, how canſt thou expect he ſhould be faithful to thee? It is true indeed, that "he abides faithful, he cannot deny himſelf;" but if thou haſt any ingenuity in thee, this ſhould be an argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am ſure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful: for if thou breakeſt the covenant thou haſt entred into, and neglecteſt the conditions upon which GOD hath ſuſpended the performance of his promiſe, thou diſchargeſt the obligation on his part.

2. Towards men: we ſhould charge our ſelves with truth in all our words, and faithfulneſs in all our promiſes. It becomes us who worſhip "the "GOD of truth," to ſpeak truth; to uſe plainneſs and ſincerity in all our words, to abhor falſhood and diſſimulation, and thoſe more refined ways of lying,

by equivocation of words, and secret reservations of our minds, on purpose to deceive. Those that plead for these, it is a sign they do not understand the nature of GOD, and of religion; which is, to conform our selves to the divine perfections. We meet with many complaints in the old testament, of the want of truth and faithfulness among men, Psal. xii. 1, 2. Isa. lix. 13, 14, 15. Jer. vii. 2, 8,9. ii. 4, 5, 6. Hos. iv. 1. I am afraid there is as much reason for this complaint now; for we live in an age of greater light, which doth reprove and make manifest this work of darkness; and methinks there is no sadder sign of the decay of Christianity, and of the little power and influence that the gospel hath upon us, than that there is so little regard had by Christians to these moral duties, which, because moral, (however men may slight that word) are therefore of eternal and indispensable obligation, having their foundation in the nature of GOD. SERM. CXLI.

To conclude all: that man that can dispense with himself as to moral duties, that makes no conscience of telling a lie, or breaking his word, what badge soever he may wear, what title soever he may call himself by, it is as impossible that such a man should be a true Christian, as it is to reconcile "the GOD of "truth," and "the father of lies."

SERMON CXLII.

The holineſs of God.

1 PET. i. 16.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.

SERM. CLXII.

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Inquire, what we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God.

II. Endeavour to ſhew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God. There is ſome difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in ſcripture, than this of holineſs, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have ſpoken more ſparingly of, than this.

The general notion of holineſs is, that it is a ſeparation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent uſe. And this notion of holineſs is applicable either to things or perſons. To things; thus the veſſels of the tabernacle, and the veſtments of the prieſts, were ſaid to be holy, becauſe they were ſeparated from common uſe, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent uſe of the ſervice of God. Holineſs of perſons is two-fold; either relative and external, which ſignifies the peculiar relation of a perſon to God; ſuch were called, ἱερεῖς, prieſts, or holy men: or elſe habitual and inherent; ſuch is the holineſs of good men, and it is a ſeparation from moral imperfection, that is, from ſin and impurity;

purity: and this is called ὁσιότης, and the primary notion of it is negative, and ſignifies the abſence and remotion of ſin. And this appears in thoſe explications which the ſcripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by oppoſition to ſin and impurity, 2 Cor. vii. 1. "Let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs "of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs;" where holineſs is oppoſed to all filthineſs. Sometimes by the negation of ſin and defilement. So we find holy, and without blame put together, Eph. i. 4. "holy "and without blemiſh," Eph. v. 27. "holy, harm-"leſs, and undefiled," Heb. vii. 26. It is true, indeed, this negative notion doth imply ſomething that is poſitive; it doth not only ſignify the abſence of ſin, but a contrariety to it; we cannot conceive the abſence of ſin, without the preſence of grace; as, take away crookedneſs from a thing, and it immediately becomes ſtrait. When ever we are made holy, every luſt and corruption in us is ſupplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this habitual holineſs of perſons, which conſiſts in a ſeparation from ſin, is a conformity to the holineſs of GOD; and by this we may come to underſtand what holineſs in GOD is: and it ſignifies the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is ſeparated and removed at an infinite diſtance from moral imperfection, and that which we call ſin; that is, there is no ſuch thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injuſtice, or falſhood, or unfaithfulneſs in GOD; or if there be any other thing that ſignifies ſin, and vice, and moral imperfection, holineſs ſignifies that the divine nature is at an infinite diſtance from all theſe, and poſſeſſed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all thoſe texts that remove moral imperfection

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perfection from GOD, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do ſet forth the holineſs of GOD. Jam. i. 13. "GOD cannot be tempted "with evil." Job viii. 3. "Doth GOD pervert judg- "ment, or doth the Almighty pervert juſtice?" Job xxxiv. 10, 12. "Far be it from GOD that he ſhould "do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he "ſhould commit iniquity. Yea, ſurely, GOD will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert "judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "Is there unrighteouſ- "neſs with GOD? GOD forbid." Zeph. iii. 5. "The "juſt LORD is in the midſt thereof, he will not do "iniquity." And ſo falſhood, and unfaithfulneſs, and inconſtancy, Deut. xxxii. 4. "A GOD of truth, "and without iniquity." 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The "ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie." Tit. i. 2. "In "hope of eternal life, which GOD, that cannot lie, "hath promiſed." Heb. vi. 18. "That by two "immutable things, in which it was impoſſible for "GOD to lie." Therefore you ſhall find, that holineſs is joined with all the moral perfections of the divine nature, or put for them. Hoſ. xi. 9. "I am "the holy One in the midſt of thee;" that is, "the "merciful One." Pſal. cxlv. 17. "The LORD is "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Rom. vii. 12. "The commandment is holy, and "juſt, and good." Rev. iii. 7. "Theſe things "ſaith he that is holy, he that is true." Rev. vi. 10. "How long, O LORD, holy and true?" Pſalm cv. 42. "He remembred his holy promiſe," holy, that is, in reſpect of the faithfulneſs of it. Iſaiah lv. 3. "The ſure mercies of David; τὰ ὅσια, the "holy mercies of David," which will not fail.

So that the holineſs of GOD is not a particular, but an univerſal perfection, and runs through all the moral

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moral perfections of the divine nature; it is the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: take away this, and you bring an univerſal ſtain and blemiſh upon the divine nature; without holineſs, power would be an oppreſſion; and wiſdom, ſubtilty; and ſovereignty, tyranny; and goodneſs, malice and envy; and juſtice, cruelty; and mercy, fooliſh pity; and truth, falſhood. And therefore the ſcripture ſpeaks of this, as GOD's higheſt excellency and perfection. GOD is ſaid to be "glorious in holineſs:" Exod. xv. 11. Holineſs is called GOD's throne. Pſal. xlvii. 8. "He ſitteth "upon the throne of his holineſs." This is that which makes heaven. Iſaiah lxiii. 15. It is called, "the habitation of his holineſs, and of his glory;" as if this were the very nature of GOD, and the ſum of his perfections. The knowledge of GOD is called "the knowledge of the holy One." Prov. ix. 10. "To be made partakers of a divine nature," and "to be made partakers of GOD's holineſs," are equivalent expreſſions. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Heb. xii. 10. And becauſe there is no perfection of GOD greater, therefore he is repreſented as ſwearing by this; Pſal. lx. 6. "GOD hath ſpoken in his holineſs. Pſal. lxxxix. 35. "Once have I ſworn by my holineſs." The angels and glorified ſpirits they ſum up the perfections of GOD in this, Iſa. vi. 3. "And one cried "unto another, and ſaid, holy, holy, holy is the "LORD of hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glo-"ry." Rev. iv. 8. "And they reſt not day and "night, ſaying, holy, holy, holy, LORD GOD al-"mighty, which was, and is, and is to come." There is no attribute of GOD ſo often repeated as this; in ſome copies it is nine times.

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II. I ſhall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to GOD:

Firſt, from the light of nature. The philoſophers, in all their diſcourſes of GOD, agree in this, that whatever ſounds like vice and imperfection, is to be ſeparated from the divine nature; which is to acknowledge his holineſs. Plato, ſpeaking of our likeneſs to GOD, ſaith, ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. Dan. iv. 9. King Nebuchadnezzar calls GOD by this title, "I know that "the ſpirit of the holy gods is in thee." In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of GOD's moral perfections, proves his holineſs.

Secondly, from ſcripture. There is no title more frequently given to GOD, in ſcripture, and ſo often ingeminated, as this of his holineſs. He is called holineſs itſelf, Iſa. lxiii. 15. Where heaven is called "the habitation of his holineſs," that is, of GOD. His name is ſaid to be holy, Luke i. 49. "And "holy is his name." He is called "the holy One," Iſaiah xl. 25. "The holy One of Iſrael," Iſaiah xli. 20. "The holy One of Jacob," xlix. 23. He is ſaid to be "holy in all his works and promiſes." Pſal. cv. 42. "In all his ways and works," Pſal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three perſons in the bleſſed Trinity: to GOD the father in innumerable places: to GOD the ſon, Dan. ix. 24. "To anoint the moſt holy." The devil cannot deny him this title, Luke iv. 34. "I know thee who "thou art, the holy One of GOD:" and the Spirit of GOD hath this title conſtantly given it, the holy Ghoſt, or the holy Spirit, or the Spirit of holineſs. The ſcripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to GOD, 1 Sam. ii. 2. "There is none holy "as the LORD." Rev. xv. 4. "For thou only art holy."

" holy." Holineſs is a communicable perfection; but no creature can partake of it in ſuch a manner and degree as the divine nature poſſeſſeth it. GOD is eternally holy, the fountain of holineſs; the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. GOD is eminently and tranſcendently ſo; the creatures, in a finite degree. GOD is immutably ſo, it is impoſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe; but no creature is out of an abſolute poſſibility of ſin. In this ſenſe it is ſaid, Job iv. 18. That " he putteth no truſt in his ſervants, " and his angels he charged with folly." And " chap. xv. 15. He putteth no truſt in his ſaints; " yea, the heavens are not clean in his ſight." From all which I ſhall draw theſe inferences.

If holineſs be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of GOD; if, in the notion of GOD, there be included an everlaſting ſeparation and diſtance from moral imperfection, an eternal repugnance to ſin and iniquity; from hence we may infer, that there is an intrinſecal good and evil in things; and the reaſons and reſpects of moral good and evil do not depend upon any mutable, and inconſtant, and arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indiſpenſable. Therefore they do not ſeem to me to ſpeak ſo ſafely, who make the divine will, preciſely and abſtractedly conſidered, the rule of moral good and evil; as if there were nothing good or evil in it's own nature antecedently to the will of GOD, but that all things are therefore good or evil, becauſe GOD wills them to be ſo: for if this were ſo, goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and faithfulneſs, would not be eſſential, and neceſſary, and immutable properties of the divine nature, but accidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable; which is to ſuppoſe that GOD, if he pleaſed, might

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be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true. For if theſe depend merely upon the will of GOD, and be not neceſſary or eſſential properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of theſe, malice, and envy, and unrighteouſneſs, and falſhood do not imply any eſſential repugnancy to the divine nature; which is plainly contrary to what the ſcripture tells us, that "GOD cannot be tempted with evil;" that "it is "impoſſible he ſhould lie," that he "cannot be un-"righteous."

If any man ſay that GOD hath now declared himſelf to be juſt, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwiſe, becauſe "he is a GOD of truth, "and he changeth not;" this is to grant the thing: for this ſuppoſeth the veracity and immutability of GOD to be eſſential and neceſſary perfections of the divine nature; and why not juſtice and goodneſs as well? I ſay, it ſuppoſeth veracity and immutability to be eſſential perfections, and not to depend upon the will of GOD; that is, that GOD cannot will to be otherwiſe than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what aſſurance can we poſſibly have, but that when he declares himſelf to be good, and juſt, he is, or may be otherwiſe?

But I need not inſiſt upon this, which ſeems to be ſo very clear, and to carry it's own evidence along with it. I will only uſe this argument to prove it, and ſo leave it. No being can will it's own nature, and eſſential perfections, that is, chuſe whether it will be thus, or otherwiſe; for that were to ſuppoſe it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about it's own nature. Therefore, if this be the nature of GOD, (which, I think, no body will deny) to be good, and juſt, and true, and neceſſarily to be what he is; then goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth

truth do not depend upon the will of GOD, but there are ſuch things, ſuch notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no way prejudice the liberty of GOD; for this is the higheſt perfection, to be neceſſarily good, and juſt, and true; and a liberty or poſſibility to be otherwiſe is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where ſpeaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is converſant are indifferent; in all other things it is the higheſt perfection not to be free and indifferent, but immutable and fixed, and neceſſarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, ſo that it ſhall not be poſſible to ſwerve from them; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, which we call his holineſs. SERM. CXLII.

2. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this ſhews us what account we are to make of ſin, and wickedneſs, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkneſs are oppoſed, as habit and privation; if light be pleaſant and comfortable, then darkneſs is diſmal and horrid. And ſo holineſs and ſin are oppoſed: if holineſs be the higheſt perfection of any nature, then ſin is the grand imperfection, and the loweſt debaſement of any being; becauſe it is the moſt oppoſite to that, and at the furtheſt diſtance from that which is the firſt excellency and perfection.

This ſhould rectify our judgment and eſteem of things and perſons. We admire and eſteem riches, and power, and greatneſs; and we ſcorn and contemn poverty, and weakneſs, and meanneſs; yea, grace and holineſs, if it be in the company of theſe. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be

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wicked, and to deſpiſe the poor man's wiſdom and holineſs; but we make a falſe judgment of things and perſons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of reſpect, that ought to command our reverence and eſteem, but real worth, and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to beſtow our reſpect, and raiſe our eſteem. What St. James ſaith of reſpect of perſons, I may apply in this caſe, Jam. ii. 4. "Are ye not then partial in your ſelves, and become judges of evil thoughts?" We are extremely partial; we make a falſe judgment, and reaſon ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and wickedneſs exalted to high places; I mean, ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to GOD, and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holineſs and piety. Were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudiced, we ſhould ſee a beauty and reſplendency in goodneſs; even when it is under the greateſt diſadvantage, when it is clothed with rags, and ſits upon a dunghill, it would ſhine through all theſe miſts, and we ſhould ſee a native light and beauty in it, through the darkneſs of a poor and low condition: and we ſhould ſee wickedneſs to be a moſt vile and abject thing, when it appears in all it's gallantry and bravery; we ſhould look upon the poor righteous man, as "more excellent than his neighbour;" and the profane gallant, as the "off-ſcouring of the earth." We ſhould value a man that "does juſtice, and loves mercy, and ſpeaks the truth to his neighbour;" we ſhould eſteem any one more upon the account of any one of theſe ſimple qualities, than we ſhould another man deſtitute of theſe, upon the account of an hundred titles of honour, and

ten thouſand acres of land. A wicked, unholy man, he is a vile perſon, who deſerves to be contemned; and an holy man, he is the right honourable; Pſal. xv. 4. "In whoſe eyes a vile perſon is "contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the "LORD." The vile perſon is oppoſed to him that fears the LORD. He that is bold to affront GOD, and ſin againſt him, is the baſe and ignoble perſon. GOD himſelf, who is poſſeſſed of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows beſt how to judge of theſe, he tells us, how we ſhould value our ſelves and others, Jer. ix. 23, 24. "Let not the wiſe "man glory in his wiſdom, neither let the mighty "man glory in his might; let not the rich man "glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory "in this, that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, "that I am the LORD which exerciſe loving-kindneſs, judgment, and righteouſneſs in the earth; "for in theſe things I delight, ſaith the LORD." To know theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſignifies here, to underſtand them ſo as to imitate them. I do not ſpeak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to leſſen the reſpect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued but wickedneſs and vice: and I would have thoſe who have ſtore of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add religion to their riches, and holineſs to their honour, that they may be current for their intrinſick value, rather than for the image and picture of worth which the world hath ſtamped upon them.

3. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an abſurd and unreaſonable thing is it, to ſcorn and deſpiſe holineſs, to mock and deride men under this very title! The

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The world is much blinded, that they do not ſee the great evil of ſin, and the beauty and excellencey of holineſs: but that men ſhould be ſo infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to miſtake things of ſo vaſt difference, as ſin, and holineſs; to "call "good evil, and evil good;" that ſin, which is the vileſt thing in the world, ſhould be eſteemed and cheriſhed, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckoned amongſt the excellencies and accompliſhments of human nature; and holineſs, which is ſo great a perfection, ſhould be a name of hatred and diſgrace, to be contemned and perſecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the moſt radiant perfection of the divine nature, ſhould be matter of ſcorn and contempt; as the apoſtle ſpeaks in another caſe, "behold! ye deſpiſers, and wonder, and pe-"riſh." Do ye think the holy and juſt GOD will put up theſe affronts and indignities? Ye do not only deſpiſe men, but ye deſpiſe GOD alſo. You cannot contemn that which GOD accounts his glory, without reviling the divine nature, and offering deſpite to GOD himſelf. The malice reacheth heaven, and is levelled againſt GOD, whenever ye ſlight holineſs.

4. If GOD be a holy GOD, and hath ſuch a repugnancy in his nature to ſin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The holy GOD cannot but hate ſin, and be an enemy to wickedneſs; and the hatred of GOD is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man; becauſe where hatred is backed with power, the effects of it are terrible. But the hatred of the almighty and eternal GOD, is much more dreadful; becauſe the effects of it are greater, and more laſting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmoſt they can do; "they can but kill the bo-"dy;

" dy; after that, they have no more that they can " do:" they cannot hurt our ſouls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and purſue us into another world: but the effects of GOD's hatred and diſpleaſure are mighty and laſting, they extend themſelves to all eternity; for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmoſt of what omnipotent juſtice can do to ſinners? " It is a dreadful thing " to fall into the hands of the living GOD;" becauſe he that lives for ever, can puniſh for ever. We are miſerable, if GOD do not love us. Thoſe words, " my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him," ſignify great miſery, and expreſs a dreadful curſe: but it is a more poſitive expreſſion of miſery, for GOD to hate us; that ſignifies ruin and deſtruction to the utmoſt; Pſal. v. 4. " Thou art not a GOD that " hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil " dwell with thee." This is a μείωσις, and expreſſeth leſs than is intended. GOD is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards ſin and wickedneſs; therefore the pſalmiſt adds, " thou hateſt all " the workers of iniquity; and then, in the next verſe, to ſhew what is the effect of GOD's hatred, " thou ſhalt deſtroy them that ſpeak leaſing." Therefore, ſinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of GOD's holineſs.

5. Imitate the holineſs of GOD: this is the inference here in the text, " be ye holy, for I am holy." Holineſs, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of GOD: and when it is ſaid, " be ye holy;" it is as much as if he had ſaid, be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am ſo. Therefore religion is called " the knowledge " of the holy One," Prov. ix. 10. and chap. xxx. 3. And our imitation of GOD is expreſſed by our

" putting

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" putting on the new man, which after GOD is " created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs," Eph. iv. 24. Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of GOD, and the ſum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like GOD, let us conform our ſelves to the holy GOD; endeavour to be habitually holy, which is our conformity to the nature of GOD; and actually holy, which is our conformity to the will of GOD. I will not enlarge upon this, becauſe I have preſſed the imitation of theſe particular perfections, goodneſs, patience, juſtice, truth, and faithfulneſs upon other texts. I ſhall only mention two arguments, to excite and quicken our deſires and endeavour after holineſs.

1. Holineſs is an imitation of the higheſt excellency and perfection. Holineſs, I told you, ſignifies a ſeparation from ſin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and, conſequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and juſtice, and veracity, and faithfulneſs of GOD; now theſe are the very beauty and glory of the divine nature. The firſt thing that we attribute to GOD, next to his being, is his goodneſs, and thoſe other attributes which have a neceſſary connection with it; his greatneſs and majeſty is nothing elſe but the glory which reſults from his united perfections, eſpecially from his goodneſs, and thoſe perfections which are akin to it. Separate from GOD theſe perfections, which holineſs includes in it, and what would be left but an omnipotent evil, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do miſchief? which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impoſſible a thing, as can be imagined: ſo that if we have any ſparks

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of ambition in us, we cannot but aſpire after holineſs, which is ſo great an excellency and perfection of GOD himſelf. There is a vulgar prejudice againſt holineſs, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous ſpirit; whereas holineſs is the only true greatneſs of mind, the moſt genuine nobility, and the higheſt gallantry of ſpirit; and however it be deſpiſed by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. Holineſs is the firſt part of the character of "the wiſdom that is from above;" Jam. iii. 17. "the wiſdom that is from above, is "firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be "entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, with-"out partiality, and without hypocriſy."

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2. Holineſs is an eſſential and principal ingredient of happineſs. Holineſs is a ſtate of peace and tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of happineſs; and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, ſo it would be miſerable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injuſtice, or unfaithfulneſs, it would be liable to vexation and diſcontent, than which nothing can be a greater diſturbance of happineſs: ſo that holineſs is neceſſary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the happineſs of the next life, but to our preſent peace and contentment. If reaſonable creatures could be happy, as brute beaſts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of ſenſe and fancy, GOD would not have bound us up to a law and rule, but hath left us as he hath done unreaſonable creatures, to ſatisfy our luſts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reaſonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of come-

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lineſs and filthineſs, ſo woven and twiſted into their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impoſſible that ſuch creatures ſhould be happy otherwiſe, than by complying with theſe notions, and obeying the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go againſt, they will naturally feel remorſe and torment in their own ſpirits; their minds will be uneaſy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and diſpleaſed with themſelves for what they have done. So the apoſtle tells us, Rom. i. that even the moſt degenerate heathens had conſciences, which did accuſe or excuſe them, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. GOD therefore, who knows our frame, hath ſo adapted his law to us, which is the rule of holineſs, that if we live up to it, we ſhall avoid the unſpeakable torment of a guilty conſcience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we ſhall always be at diſcord with our ſelves, and in a perpetual diſquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to the law of it's being, that is, to it's own nature, without diſpleaſure and reluctancy; the conſequence of which, in moral actions, is guilt; which is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, ſomething which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is, a reaſonable creature, he ought not to do.

So that in all reaſonable creatures there is a certain kind of temper and diſpoſition that is neceſſary and eſſential to happineſs, and that is holineſs; which, as it is the perfection, ſo it is the great felicity of the divine nature: and, on the contrary, this is one chief

chief part of the miſery of thoſe wicked, accurſed ſpirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to GOD, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked; that is, of ſuch a temper as is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf: and here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſitions of our ſpirits; and till that be cured, which can only be done by holineſs, it is as impoſſible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himſelf, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe; and the external preſence of GOD, and local heaven, would ſignify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of muſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone. If a ſenſual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like "the rich man in hell," he would be tormented with a continual thirſt, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires, and would not meet with the leaſt drop of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to quench and allay the heat: the reaſon is, becauſe ſuch a man hath that within him, which torments him, and he cannot be at eaſe till that be removed. Sin is the violent, and unnatural, and uneaſy ſtate of our ſoul; every wicked man's ſpirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by holineſs, he will be perpetually diſquieted, and can have no reſt within himſelf. The prophet fitly deſcribes the condition of ſuch a perſon, Iſa. lvii. 20, 21. "But the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when "it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt forth mire and "dirt: There is no peace, ſaith my GOD, to the "wicked." So long as a man is unholy, ſo long as filthineſs and corruption abound in his heart, they will be

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reſtleſly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itſelf of it's dregs and foulneſs. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the ſpirit of a wicked man; it is like the ſea, when it roars and rages through the ſtrength of contrary winds; it is the ſcene of furious luſts, and wild paſſions, which as they are contrary to holineſs, ſo they maintain perpetual conteſts and feuds among themſelves.

All ſin ſeparates us from GOD, who is the foundation of our happineſs. Our limited nature, and the narrowneſs of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in our ſelves: it is peculiar to GOD to be his own happineſs; but man, becauſe he is finite, and therefore cannot be ſelf-ſufficient, is carried forth by an innate deſire of happineſs, to ſeek his felicity in GOD. So that there is in the nature of man a ſpring of reſtleſs motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himſelf, and toſſes him to and fro, till he comes to reſt in ſomething that is ſelf-ſufficient. Our ſouls, when they are ſeparated from GOD, like the unclean ſpirit in the goſpel, when it was caſt out, "wander up and down in dry "and deſart places, ſeeking reſt, but finding none." Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the leaſt attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be ſatisfied with himſelf; there is ſomething within him that would not let him be at reſt, but would tear him from his own foundation and conſiſtency; ſo that when we are once broken off from GOD, the ſenſe of inward want doth ſtimulate and force us to ſeek our contentment elſewhere. So that nothing but holineſs, which re-unites us to GOD, and reſtores our ſouls to their primitive and original ſtate, can

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make us happy, and give peace and reſt to our ſouls: and this is the conſtant voice and language of ſcripture, and the tenor of the bible; "Acquaint now "thy ſelf with him, and be at peace," Job xxii. 21. "Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for "the upright in heart," Pſal. xcvii. 11. "The "work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the ef- "fect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for "ever," Iſa. xxxii. 17.

Seeing then holineſs is ſo high a perfection, and ſo great a happineſs, let theſe arguments prevail with us to aſpire after this temper, that "as he who hath "called us is holy, ſo we may be holy in all manner "of converſation, becauſe it is written, be ye holy, "for I am holy."

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The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

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THE ſubject which I have now propoſed to treat of, is certainly one of the greateſt and nobleſt arguments in the world, the goodneſs of GOD; the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of the beſt and moſt excellent of beings, than which nothing deſerves more to be conſidered by us, nor ought in reaſon to affect us more. The goodneſs of

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GOD is the cauſe, and the continuance of our beings, the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of our happineſs; our greateſt comfort, and our faireſt example, the chief object of our love, and praiſe, and admiration, the joy and rejoicing of our hearts; and therefore the meditation and diſcourſe of it muſt needs be pleaſant and delightful to us: the great difficulty will be, to confine our ſelves upon ſo copious an argument, and to ſet bounds to that which is of ſo vaſt an extent, "the LORD is good to all, and "his tender mercies are over all his works."

Which words are an argument, which the divine pſalmiſt uſeth, to ſtir up himſelf and others to the praiſe of GOD: at the 3d verſe he tells us, that "the LORD is great, and greatly to be praiſed;" and he gives the reaſon of this, verſe 8. and 9. from thoſe properties and perfections of the divine nature, which declare his goodneſs, "the LORD is gracious, and full of compaſſion, ſlow to anger, and "of great mercy: the LORD is good to all, and his "tender mercies are over all his works:" where you have the goodneſs of GOD declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in reſpect of the objects of it; "the LORD is good to all."

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall do theſe four things:

Firſt, conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs, as it is attributed to GOD.

Secondly, ſhew that this perfection belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, conſider the effects and the extent of it.

Fourthly, anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of GOD.

Firſt, what is the proper notion of goodneſs, as it is attributed to GOD.

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There is a dry metaphyſical notion of goodneſs, which only ſignifies the being and eſſential properties of a thing: but this is a good word ill beſtowed; for in this ſenſe, every thing that hath being, even the devil himſelf, is good.

And there is a moral notion of goodneſs; and that is twofold:

1. More general, in oppoſition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call ſin and vice; and ſo the juſtice, and truth, and holineſs of GOD are, in this ſenſe, his goodneſs. But there is,

2. Another notion of moral goodneſs, which is more particular and reſtrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue, in oppoſition to a particular vice: and this is the proper and uſual acceptation of the word goodneſs; and the beſt deſcription I can give of it is this; that it is a certain propenſion and diſpoſition of mind, whereby a perſon is inclined to deſire and procure the happineſs of others; and it is beſt underſtood by it's contrary, which is an envious diſpoſition, a contracted and narrow ſpirit, which would confine happineſs to it itſelf, and grudgeth that others ſhould partake of it, or ſhare in it; or a malicious and miſchievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and miſchief to them. To communicate and lay out ourſelves for the good of others, is goodneſs; and ſo the apoſtle explains doing good, by communicating to others, who are in miſery, or in want: Heb. xiii. 16. "but to do good, and to communi-"cate, forget not." The Jews made a diſtinction between a righteous and a good man: to which the apoſtle alludes, Rom. v. 7. "ſcarcely for a righte-"ous man will one die: yet peradventure for a "good man ſome would even dare to die." The righteous

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righteous man was he that did no wrong to others: and the good man, he who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that goodneſs is a readineſs and diſpoſition to communicate the good and happineſs which we enjoy, and to be willing others ſhould partake of it.

This is the notion of goodneſs among men; and it is the ſame in GOD, only with this difference, that GOD is originally and tranſcendently good; but the creatures are, the beſt of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from GOD, who is the fountain and original of goodneſs; which is the meaning of our SAVIOUR, Luke xviii. 19. when he ſays, "there is none good ſave one, that is, GOD." But though the degrees of goodneſs in GOD, and the creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that goodneſs which is in us be ſo ſmall and inconſiderable that, compared with the goodneſs of GOD, it does not deſerve that name; yet the eſſential notion of goodneſs in both muſt be the ſame; elſe when the ſcripture ſpeaks of the goodneſs of GOD, we could not know the meaning of it; and if we do not at all underſtand what it is for GOD to be good, it is all one to us (for ought we know) whether he be good or not; for he may be ſo, and we never the better for it, if we do not know what goodneſs in GOD is, and conſequently when he is ſo, and when not.

Beſides that, the goodneſs of GOD is very frequently in ſcripture propounded to our imitation; but it is impoſſible for us to imitate that, which we do not underſtand what it is: from whence it is certain, that the goodneſs which we are to endeavour after, is the ſame that is in GOD; becauſe in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of GOD, that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according

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to the rate and condition of creatures, and ſo far as we, whoſe natures are imperfect, are capable of reſembling the divine goodneſs. SERM. CXLIII.

Thus much for the notion of goodneſs in GOD; it is a propenſion and diſpoſition in the divine nature, to communicate being and happineſs to his creatures.

Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, in the next place, that this perfection of goodneſs belongs to GOD; and that from theſe three heads.

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture and divine revelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. The generality of the heathens agree in it, and there is hardly any perfection of GOD more univerſally acknowledged by them. I always except the ſect of the Epicureans, who attribute nothing but eternity and happineſs to the divine nature; and yet if they would have conſidered it, happineſs without goodneſs is impoſſible. I do not find that they do expreſly deny this perfection to GOD, or that they aſcribe to him the contrary; but they clearly take away all the evidence and arguments of the divine goodneſs; for they ſuppoſed GOD to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himſelf, and had no regard to any thing without himſelf, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himſelf in the happineſs or miſery of any of them; ſo that their notion of a deity was, in truth, the proper notion of an idle being, that is called GOD, and neither does good nor evil.

But ſetting aſide this atheiſtical ſect, the reſt of the heathens did unanimouſly affirm and believe the goodneſs of GOD; and this was the great foundation of their religion; and all their prayers to GOD,

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and praiſes of him, did neceſſarily ſuppoſe a perſuaſion of the divine goodneſs. Whoſoever prays to GOD, muſt have a perſuaſion or good hopes of his readineſs to do him good; and to praiſe GOD, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. Seneca hath an excellent paſſage to this purpoſe, "he "(ſays he) that denies the goodneſs of GOD, does "not, ſurely, conſider the infinite number of pray- "ers that, with hands lifted up to heaven, are put "up to GOD, both in private and publick; which "certainly would not be, nor is it credible, that all "mankind ſhould conſpire in this madneſs of putting "up their ſupplications to deaf and impotent deities, "if they did not believe that the gods were ſo good "as to confer benefits upon thoſe who prayed "to them."

But we need not infer their belief of GOD's goodneſs from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them than expreſly to attribute this perfection of goodneſs to him; and among the divine titles, this always had the pre-eminence, both among the Greeks and Romans; ἐὺς τε μέγας τε, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their conſtant ſtile; and in our language, the name of GOD ſeems to have been given him from his goodneſs. I might produce innumerable paſſages out of the heathen authors to this purpoſe; but I ſhall only mention that remarkable one out of Seneca; *primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere; deinde reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine qua nulla majeſtas:* "The "firſt act of worſhip is to believe the being of GOD; "and the next, to aſcribe majeſty or greatneſs to "him; and to aſcribe goodneſs, without which there "can be no greatneſs."

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture, and divine

revelation. I ſhall mention but a few of thoſe many texts of ſcripture, which declare to us the goodneſs of GOD, Exod. xxxiv. 6. where GOD makes his name known to Moſes; "The LORD, the LORD GOD, "merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abun- "dant in goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 5. "Thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive." Pſal. cxix. 68. "Thou art good, and doſt good." And that which is ſo often repeated in the book of Pſalms; "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is "good, and his mercy endureth for ever." Our bleſſed SAVIOUR attributes this perfection to GOD, in ſo peculiar and tranſcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable, Luke xviii. 19. "There is none "good, ſave one, that is GOD." The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent and tranſcendent degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſſed of it. SERM. CXLIII.

To the ſame purpoſe are thoſe innumerable teſtimonies of ſcripture which declare GOD to be gracious, and merciful, and long-ſuffering: for theſe are but ſeveral branches of his goodneſs; his grace is the freeneſs of his goodneſs to thoſe who have not deſerved it: his mercy is his goodneſs to thoſe who are in miſery: his patience is his goodneſs to thoſe who are guilty, in deferring the puniſhment due to them.

III. The goodneſs of GOD may likewiſe be argued from the perfection of the divine nature, theſe two ways:

1. Goodneſs is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to GOD.

2. There are ſome footſteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in GOD.

1. Goodneſs is the higheſt perfection, and therefore it muſt needs belong to GOD, who is the moſt

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perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections; but ſeparated from goodneſs, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree; but yet, for all that, be a devil. Goodneſs is ſo great and neceſſary a perfection, that, without it, there can be no other; it gives perfection to all other excellencies: take away this, and the greateſt excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greateſt imperfections: and therefore our SAVIOUR ſpeaks of the goodneſs and mercy of GOD, as the ſum of his perfections; what one evangeliſt hath, "be ye merciful, as your Father which is in "heaven is merciful," is rendered in another, "be "ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in "heaven is perfect." Goodneſs is ſo eſſential to a perfect being, that if we once ſtrip GOD of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections; and therefore when Moſes deſired to ſee GOD's glory, he ſaid, "he would make all his good-"neſs to paſs before him." Exod. xxxiii. 19. This is the moſt amiable perfection, and, as it were, the beauty of the divine nature, Zach. ix. 17. "how "great is his goodneſs, and how great is his beauty?" *ſine bonitate nulla majeſtas*, "without goodneſs there "can be no majeſty." Other excellencies may cauſe fear and amazement in us; but nothing but goodneſs can command ſincere love and veneration.

2. There are ſome footſteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it muſt be much more eminently in GOD. There is in every creature ſome repreſentation of ſome divine perfection or other; but GOD doth not own any creature to be after his image, that is deſtitute of goodneſs. The creatures that want reaſon and underſtanding are incapable of this

this moral goodneſs we are ſpeaking of; man is the first in the rank of creatures that is endowed with it, and he is ſaid to be "made after the image of "GOD, and to have dominion given him over the "creatures below him;" to ſignify to us, that if man had not been made after GOD's image, in reſpect of goodneſs, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures; becauſe, without goodneſs, dominion would be tyranny and oppreſſion; and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodneſs, the more it reſembles GOD; as the bleſſed angels, who "behold the face of GOD continually," and are thereby "transformed into his image, from glory "to glory," their whole buſineſs and employment is, to do good; and the devil, though he reſembles GOD in other perfections of knowledge and power, yet becauſe he is evil, and envious, and miſchievous, and ſo contrary to GOD in this perfection, he is the moſt oppoſite and hateful to him of all creatures whatſoever. SERM. CXLIII.

And if this perfection be in ſome degree in the creature, it is much more in GOD; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently poſſeſſed of it himſelf. All that goodneſs which is in the beſt natured of the ſons of men, or in the moſt glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak repreſentation of the divine goodneſs.

The third thing I propoſed to conſider, was, the effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of the objects of it: "the "LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are "over all his works; thou art good, and doeſt "good," ſays David, Pſal. cxix. 68. The great evidence and demonſtration of GOD's goodneſs, is from the effects of it. To the ſame purpoſe St. Paul ſpeaks,

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ſpeaks, Acts xiv. 17. "He hath not left himſelf "without witneſs, in that he doth good, and ſends "us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons."

I ſhall conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs, under theſe two heads:

I. The univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to all his creatures.

II. I ſhall conſider more particularly the goodneſs of GOD to men, which we are more eſpecially concerned to take notice of.

I. The univerſal extent of his goodneſs to the whole creation; "the LORD is good to all." The whole creation furniſheth us with clear evidences and demonſtrations of the divine goodneſs; which way ſoever we caſt our eyes, we are encountered with undeniable inſtances of the goodneſs of GOD; and every thing that we behold, is a ſenſible demonſtration of it; "the heavens declare the glory of GOD, and "the firmament ſheweth his handy-work," ſays the Pſalmiſt, Pſal. xix. 1. And again, Pſal. xxxiii. 5. "The earth is full of the goodneſs of the LORD." The whole frame of this world, and every creature in it, and all the ſeveral degrees of being and perfection, which are in the creatures, and the providence of GOD towards them all, in the preſervation of them, and providing for the happineſs of all of them in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, are a plentiful demonſtration of the divine goodneſs; which I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate in theſe four particulars.

1. The univerſal goodneſs of GOD appears, in giving being to ſo many creatures.

2. In making them all ſo very good; conſidering the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preſervation of them.

4. In providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs

happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it. SERM. CXLIII.

1. The extent of GOD's goodneſs appears, in giving being to ſo many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodneſs, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not GOD been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himſelf, and been unwilling that any thing beſides himſelf ſhould have been; but his goodneſs prompted him to ſpread and diffuſe himſelf, and ſet his power and wiſdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures which we ſee and know to be in the world, and, probably, to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable that GOD could have any other motive to do this, but purely the goodneſs of his nature. All the motives imaginable beſides this, muſt either be indigency and want, or conſtraint and neceſſity; but neither of theſe can have any place in GOD; and therefore it was mere goodneſs that moved him to give being to other things: and therefore all creatures have reaſon, with the four and twenty elders in the revelations, "to caſt their crowns before the throne of GOD, ſaying, Thou art worthy, "O LORD, to receive glory, and honour, and "power; for thou haſt created all things, and for "thy pleaſure (that is, of mere goodneſs) they are, "and were created."

(1.) Indigency and want can have no place in GOD; becauſe he that hath all poſſible perfection, hath all plenty in himſelf; from whence reſults all-ſufficiency and complete happineſs. So that the divine nature need not look out of itſelf for happineſs, being incapable of any addition to the happineſs and perfection it is already poſſeſſed of, *ipſa ſuis pollens opibus*,

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opibus, nihil indiga noſtri. We make things for our uſe, houſes to ſhelter us, and clothes to keep us warm; and we propagate our kind, to perpetuate our ſelves in our poſterity: but all this ſuppoſeth imperfection, and want, and mortality; to none of which the divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory which made GOD to make the world. It is true, indeed, the glory of GOD's goodneſs doth herein appear; and creatures endowed with underſtanding have reaſon to take notice of it with thankfulneſs, praiſe, and admiration: but there is no happineſs redounds to GOD from it, nor does he feed himſelf with any imaginary content and ſatisfaction, ſuch as vain-glorious perſons have, from the fluttering applauſe of their creatures and beneficiaries. GOD is really "above all "bleſſing and praiſe." It is great condeſcenſion and goodneſs in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praiſes, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not ſuffer us to ſully his great and glorious name, by taking it into our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happineſs to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happineſs and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and diſpenſe with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were it not for his goodneſs, might deſpiſe the praiſes of his creatures, with infinitely more reaſon than wiſe men do the applauſe of fools. There is, indeed, one text of ſcripture which ſeems to intimate that GOD made all creatures for himſelf, as if he had ſome need of them, Prov. xvi. 4. "The "LORD hath made all things for himſelf; yea, even "the wicked for the day of evil." Now if by GOD's making

making all things for himſelf, be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifeſtation of his wiſdom, and power, and goodneſs in the creation of the world, it is moſt true that, in this ſenſe, he made all things for himſelf: but if we underſtand it ſo, as if the goodneſs of his nature did not move him thereto, but he had ſome deſign to ſerve ends and neceſſities of his own upon his creatures, this is far from him. But it is very probable, that neither of theſe are the meaning of this text, which may be rendered, with much better ſenſe, and nearer to the Hebrew, thus, "GOD hath ordained every thing to that "which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordain-"ed for the day of evil;" that is, the wiſdom of GOD hath fitted one thing to another, puniſhment to ſin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can neceſſity and conſtraint have any place in GOD. When there was no creature yet made, nothing in being but GOD himſelf, there could be nothing to compel him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty: neither are the creatures neceſſary effects and emanations from the being of GOD, flowing from the divine eſſence, as water doth from a ſpring, and as light ſtreams from the ſun: if ſo, this, indeed, would have been an argument of the fulneſs of the divine nature, but not of the bounty and goodneſs of it; and it would have been matter of joy to us that we are, but not a true ground of thankfulneſs from us to GOD; as we rejoice and are glad that the ſun ſhines, but we do not give it any thanks for ſhining, becauſe it ſhines without any intention or deſign to do us good; it doth not know that we are the better for it's light, nor did intend we ſhould be, and therefore we have no reaſon to acknowledge it's goodneſs to us.

But GOD, who is a ſpirit endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, does not act as natural and material cauſes do, which act neceſſarily and ignorantly; whereas he acts knowingly and voluntarily, with particular intention and deſign, knowing that he does good, and intending to do ſo freely, and out of choice, and when he hath no other conſtraint upon him but this, that his goodneſs enclines his will to communicate himſelf to do good: ſo that the divine nature is under no neceſſity, but ſuch as is conſiſtent with the moſt perfect liberty, and freeſt choice.

Not but that goodneſs is eſſential to GOD, and a neceſſary perfection of his nature, and he cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe than good: but when he communicates his goodneſs, he knows what he does, and wills and chuſeth to do ſo.

And this kind of neceſſity is ſo far from being any impeachment of the divine goodneſs, that it is the great perfection and praiſe of it. The Stoick philoſophers miſtaking this, do blaſphemouſly advance their wiſe and virtuous man above GOD himſelf; for they reaſon thus; "A wiſe man is good out of "choice, when he may be otherwiſe; but GOD, "out of neceſſity of nature, and when he cannot "poſſibly be otherwiſe than good." But if they had conſidered things aright, they might have known that this is an imperfection in their wiſe man, that he can be otherwiſe than good; for a power to be evil is impotency and weakneſs. The higheſt character that ever was given of a man, is that which Velleius Paterculus gives of Cato, that he was *vir bonus, quia aliter eſſe non potuit*, "a good man, becauſe he could "not be otherwiſe:" this applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it ſignifies thus much, that it is the higheſt perfection, not

not to be able to be otherwiſe than good; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, that goodneſs is eſſential to it: but the expreſſions and communications of his goodneſs are ſpontaneous and free, deſigned and directed by infinite knowledge and wiſdom.

This is the firſt: the ſecond particular is, that GOD hath made all creatures very good, conſidering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

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The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

IN the handling of this argument, I propoſed to do theſe four things: SERM. CXLIV.

Firſt, to conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs, as it is attributed to GOD.

Secondly, to ſhew that this perfection belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, to conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of it's objects, And,

Fourthly, to anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict, and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of GOD.

I have conſidered the two firſt; and in ſpeaking

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to the third, I propoſed the conſidering theſe two things:

I. The univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to all his creatures.

II. More eſpecially the goodneſs of GOD to man, which we are more eſpecially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The firſt of theſe appears in theſe four particulars.

1. In his giving being to ſo many creatures.

2. In making them all ſo very good, conſidering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and deſign of all of them.

3. In his continual preſervation of them.

4. In his providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it.

The firſt of theſe I ſpoke largely to; I proceed to ſhew in the

2d place, That the univerſal goodneſs of GOD appears, in making all theſe creatures ſo very good, conſidering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and deſign of all of them. His goodneſs excited and ſet a-work his power to make this world, and all the creatures in it; and that they might be made in the beſt manner that could be, his wiſdom directed his power, "he hath made all things "in number, weight, and meaſure;" ſo that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another: and that there is an excellent contrivance in all ſorts of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole frame of things, is, I think, ſufficiently viſible to every diſcerning and unprejudiced mind. The loweſt form of creatures, I mean thoſe which are deſtitute of ſenſe, do all of them contribute, ſome way or other, to the uſe, and convenjency, and

comfort of the creatures above them, which being endowed with ſenſe, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being ſo palpable in the greateſt part of them, may reaſonably be preſumed, though it be not ſo diſcernable concerning all the reſt; ſo that when we ſurvey the whole creation of GOD, and the ſeveral parts, we may well cry out with David, Pſal. civ. 24. "O LORD, how manifold are thy works? in wiſdom haſt thou made them all."

It is true, indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and GOD is not equally good to all of them. Thoſe creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his goodneſs, and are more glorious inſtances of it: but every creature partakes of the divine goodneſs in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. GOD, if he pleaſed, could have made nothing but immortal ſpirits; and he could have made as many of theſe as there are individual creatures of all ſorts in the world: but it ſeemed good to the wiſe architect, to make ſeveral ranks and orders of beings, and to diſplay his power, and goodneſs, and wiſdom, in all imaginable variety of creatures; all which ſhould be good in their kind, though far ſhort of the perfection of angels and immortal ſpirits.

He that will build an houſe for all the uſes and purpoſes of which an houſe is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; muſt not ſo contrive it, as to make it all rooms of ſtate and entertainment: but there muſt of neceſſity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, which, however inferior to the reſt in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beauty

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ty and advantage of the whole: ſo in this great frame of the world, it was fit there ſhould be variety, and different degrees of perfection in the ſeveral parts of it; and this is ſo far from being an impeachment of the wiſdom or goodneſs of him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: for the meaneſt of all GOD's creatures is good, conſidering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was deſigned; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, though we can eaſily tell how it might have been worſe, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwiſe, it had not been ſo good; and thoſe who have been moſt converſant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of GOD, have been moſt ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then if we conſider the creatures of GOD, with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithſtanding this or that kind of creatures be much leſs perfect than another, and there be a very great diſtance between the perfection of a worm, and of an angel; yet conſidering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, conſidering it's nature and uſe, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of GOD, between the goodneſs of the ſeveral parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodneſs of the whole, the ſcripture is very careful to expreſs to us in the hiſtory of the creation, where you find GOD repreſented, as firſt looking upon, and conſidering every day's work by itſelf, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good, Gen. i, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. at the end of every day's work, it is ſaid, that "GOD "ſaw

" ſaw the light, that it was good:" but then, when all was finiſhed, and he ſurveyed the whole together, it is ſaid, ver. 31. that " GOD ſaw every thing that " he had made, and behold, it was very good:" very good, that is, the beſt; the Hebrews having no other ſuperlative. Every creature of GOD by itſelf is good: but take the whole together, and they are very good, the beſt that could be. SERM. CXLIV.

3. The univerſal goodneſs of GOD farther appears, in the careful and continual preſervation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the ſeveral creatures in being, in their natural ſtate and order; thoſe which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preſerving the whole world, his managing and governing this vaſt frame of things, in ſuch ſort, as to keep it from running into confuſion and diſorder. This is a clear demonſtration, no leſs of the goodneſs than of the wiſdom and power of GOD, that for ſo many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and perform the offices and work for which nature deſigned them; that the world is not, in the courſe of ſo many thouſand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things doth not diſſolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodneſs of GOD doth not only take care of the main, and ſupport the whole frame of things, and preſerve the more noble and conſiderable creatures, but even the leaſt and meaneſt of them. The providence of GOD doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor deſpiſe any of the works of his hands, ſo as to let them relapſe, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, Pſal. civ. 27, 28. where the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of the innumerable

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rable multitude of creatures upon the earth, and in the ſea, "theſe (ſaith he) wait all upon thee, that thou "mayeſt give them their meat in due ſeaſon; that "thou giveſt them, they gather; thou openeſt thine "hand, and they are filled with good." And to the ſame purpoſe, Pſal. cxlv. 15, 16. "The eyes of "all wait upon thee, and thou giveſt them their "meat in due ſeaſon; thou openeſt thine hand, and "ſatisfieſt the deſire of every living thing." The inanimate creatures, which are without ſenſe; and the brute creatures, which though they have ſenſe, are without underſtanding, and ſo can have no end and deſign of ſelf-preſervation, GOD preſerves them, no leſs than men who are endowed with reaſon and foreſight to provide for themſelves; Pſal. xxxvi. 6. "Thou preſerveſt man and beaſt." And Pſal. cxlvii. 9. "He giveth to the beaſt his food, and to the "young ravens which cry." And ſo our SAVIOUR declares to us the particular providence of GOD towards thoſe creatures, Matt. vi. 26. "Be-"hold the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, nei-"ther do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet "your heavenly Father feedeth them." Ver. 28, 29. "Conſider the lilies of the field how they grow; "they toil not, neither do they ſpin: and yet I ſay "unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was "not arrayed like one of theſe."

And though all the creatures below man, being without underſtanding, can take no notice of this bounty of GOD to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it; yet man, who is the prieſt of the viſible creation, and placed here in this great temple of the world, to offer up ſacrifices of praiſe and thankſgiving to GOD, for his univerſal goodneſs to all his creatures, ought to bleſs GOD in their behalf,

half, and to ſing praiſes to him, in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are ſubjected to his dominion and uſe; becauſe they are all, as it were, his family, his ſervants and utenſils; and if GOD ſhould neglect any of them, and ſuffer them to periſh and miſcarry, it is we that ſhould find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we ſhould on their behalf celebrate the praiſes of GOD; as we find David often does in the Pſalms, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praiſe the LORD. SERM. CXLIV.

4. The univerſal goodneſs of GOD doth yet farther appear, in providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all his creatures, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it. He doth not only ſupport and preſerve his creatures in being, but takes care that they ſhould all enjoy that happineſs and pleaſure which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with ſenſe and reaſon, which only are capable of pleaſure and happineſs, GOD hath taken care to ſatisfy the ſeveral appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as nature hath enlarged their deſires and capacities, ſo he enlargeth his bounty towards them; "he "openeth his hand, and ſatisfieth the deſire of every "living thing." GOD doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourage ſelf-preſervation, and to oblige and inſtigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath ſo ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirſt are moſt implacable deſires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable;

5.

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and likewiſe that the ſatisfaction of theſe appetites ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to them. And for thoſe creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themſelves, GOD hath planted in all creatures a στοργή, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon ſeeking proviſions for them, and cheriſhing them, with that care and tenderneſs which their weak and helpleſs condition doth require: and reaſon is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpoſe, than this natural inſtinct is in brute creatures; which ſhews what care GOD hath taken, and what proviſion he hath made in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the ſatisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the ſatisfaction whereof is their pleaſure and happineſs. And thus I have done with the firſt head I propoſed, the univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to his creatures: let us now proceed, in the

IId place, to conſider more particularly the goodneſs of GOD to men; which we are more eſpecially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own obſervation and experience, to prove the goodneſs of GOD; every day of our lives "we ſee and taſte that "the LORD is good;" all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine goodneſs: "every good and "perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from "the father of lights," Jam. i. 17. And the beſt and moſt perfect of his gifts he beſtows on the ſons of men. What is ſaid of the wiſdom of GOD, Prov. viii. may be applied to his goodneſs; the goodneſs of GOD ſhines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great

deep, in the earth and the fields, but "its delight "is with the ſons of men." Such is the goodneſs of GOD to man, that it is repreſented to us in ſcripture under the notion of love: GOD is good to all his creatures, but he is only ſaid to "love the ſons "of men." More particularly the goodneſs of GOD to man appears,

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble and excellent beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures. We owe to him that we are, and what we are; we do not only partake of that effect of his goodneſs which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him for his more eſpecial goodneſs, that he hath made us reaſonable creatures, of that kind which we ſhould have choſen to have been of, if we could ſuppoſe that, before we were, it had been referred to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this viſible world. But we did not contrive and chuſe this condition for our ſelves, we are no ways acceſſary to the dignity and excellency of our beings: but GOD choſe this condition for us, and made us what we are; ſo that we may ſay with David, Pſal. c. 3, 4, 5. "It is he "that hath made us, and not we our ſelves. O "enter into his gates with thankſgiving, and into "his courts with praiſe; be thankful unto him, "and ſpeak good of his name: for the LORD is "good." The goodneſs of GOD is the ſpring and fountain of our beings; but for that, we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodneſs, we might have been any thing, of the loweſt and meaneſt rank of his creatures. But the goodneſs of GOD hath been pleaſed to advance us to be the top and perfection of the viſible creation; he hath been pleaſed to endow

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us with mind and underſtanding, and made us capable of happineſs, in the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of himſelf. He hath curiouſly and wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodies, ſo as to make them fit habitations for reaſonable ſouls, and immortal ſpirits; he hath made our very bodies veſſels of honour, when of the very ſame clay he hath made innumerable other creatures of a much lower rank and condition: ſo that though man, in reſpect of his body, be akin to the earth, yet, in regard of his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, of a divine original, and deſcended from above. Of all the creatures in this viſible world, man is the chief; and what is ſaid of behemoth, or the elephant, Job xlii. in reſpect of his great ſtrength, and the vaſt bigneſs of his body, is only true abſolutely of man, that he is, *divini opificii caput*; "the chief of the ways of GOD, and "upon earth there is none like him."

The Pſalmiſt takes particular notice of the goodneſs of GOD to man, in this reſpect of the excellency and dignity of his being; Pſal. viii. 5. "Thou "haſt made him little lower than the angels, and "haſt crowned him with glory and honour." And this advantage of our nature above other creatures, we ought thankfully to acknowledge; though moſt men are ſo ſtupid as to overlook it; as Elihu complains, Job xxxv. 10, 11. "None ſaith, where is "GOD my maker, who teacheth us more than the "beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the "fowls of heaven?"

2. The goodneſs of GOD to man appears, in that he hath made and ordained ſo many things chiefly for our uſe. The beauty and uſefulneſs of the creatures below us, their plain ſubſerviency to our neceſſity, and benefit, and delight, are ſo many clear evidences

ces of the divine goodneſs to us, not only diſcernable to our reaſon, but even palpable to our ſenſes, ſo that we may "ſee and taſte that the LORD is gracious." SERM. CXLIV.

This David particularly inſiſts upon as a ſpecial ground of praiſe and thankſgiving to GOD, that he hath ſubjected ſo great a part of the creation to our dominion and uſe; Pſal. viii. 6, 7, 8. ſpeaking of man, "thou haſt made him to have dominion over "the works of thy hands; thou haſt put all things "under his feet: all ſheep and oxen, yea, and the "beaſts of the field: the fowl of the air, and the "fiſh of the ſea, and whatſoever paſſeth through the "paths of the ſeas." What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either ſolely or principally made for the uſe and ſervice, pleaſure and delight of man! How many things are there, which ſerve for the neceſſity and ſupport, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreſhment and delight of our ſenſes, and the exerciſe and employment of our underſtandings! That GOD hath not made man for the ſervice of other creatures, but other creatures for the ſervice of man, Epictetus doth very ingeniouſly argue from this obſervation; that the creatures below man, the brute beaſts, have all things in a readineſs, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging; ſo that they have no abſolute need that any ſhould build houſes, or make clothes, or ſtore up proviſion, or prepare and dreſs meat for them: for, ſays he, "being made for the "ſervice of another, they ought to be furniſhed "with theſe things, that they may be always in a "readineſs to ſerve their lord and maſter; a plain "evidence that they were made to ſerve man, and "not man to ſerve them."

And

And to raiſe our thoughts of GOD's goodneſs to us the ſons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures below us for our uſe and convenience; ſo hath he appointed the creatures above us for our guard and protection, not to ſay for our ſervice: Pſal. xxxiv. 7. "The angel of the LORD encampeth "round about them that fear him, and deliver- "eth them;" and then it follows, "O taſte and "ſee that the LORD is good!" and Pſal. xci. 11, 12. "He ſhall give his angels charge over thee, to "keep thee in all thy ways: they ſhall bear thee up "in their hands." Nay, the apoſtle ſpeaks as if their whole buſineſs and employment were to attend upon, and be ſerviceable to, good men; Heb. i. 14. "Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth "to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?"

3. The goodneſs of GOD to men appears, in his tender love, and peculiar care of us above the reſt of the creatures, being ready to impart and diſpenſe to us the good that is ſuitable to our capacity and condition, and concerned to exempt us from thoſe manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious: I do not mean an abſolute exemption from all ſorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual tenure of temporal happineſs, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not ſuitable to our preſent ſtate, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be beſt for us, all things conſidered. But the goodneſs of GOD to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our natures above them; for, as the apoſtle reaſons in another caſe, "doth GOD take care "for oxen," and ſhall he not much more extend his care to man? To this purpoſe our SAVIOUR reaſons; Mat. vi. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air: "for

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" for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor ga-
" ther into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth
" them; are ye not much better than they?" And ver. 30. " Wherefore if GOD ſo clothe the graſs of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt in-
" to the oven, ſhall he not much more clothe you?" and chap. x. 29, 30, 31. " Are not two ſparrows
" ſold for a farthing? and one of them ſhall not fall
" on the ground without your father. But the very
" hairs of your head are all numbred. Fear ye not
" therefore, ye are of more value than many ſpar-
" rows." It is true, GOD hath a ſpecial care of his people and ſervants, above the reſt of mankind; but our SAVIOUR uſeth theſe arguments to his diſciples, to convince them of the providence of GOD towards them, as men, and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And indeed we are born into the world more deſtitute and helpleſs than other creatures; as if it were on purpoſe to ſhew, that GOD had reſerved us for his more peculiar care and providence; which is ſo great, that the ſcripture, by way of condeſcenſion, expreſſeth it to us by the name of love; ſo that what effects of care the greateſt and tendereſt affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of GOD's goodneſs to us: and this affection of GOD is common to all men, (though, of all creatures, we have leaſt deſerved it) and is ready to diffuſe and ſhed abroad itſelf, whereever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obſtruct and ſtop the emanations of it, by their ſins and provocations.

And though the greateſt part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a ſtop to his goodneſs, though it cauſe many abatements of it, and hinder

many

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many good things from us: but ſuch is the goodneſs of GOD, notwithſtanding the evil and undutifulneſs of men, that he is pleaſed ſtill to concern himſelf in the government of the world, and to preſerve the ſocieties of men from running into utter confuſion and diſorder; notwithſtanding the violence and irregularities of men's wills and paſſions, the communities of men ſubſiſt upon tolerable terms; and notwithſtanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is uſually protected, and, ſometimes, rewarded in this world, and domineering and outragious wickedneſs is very often remarkably checked and chaſtiſed. All which inſtances of GOD's providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, ſo are they an effectual declaration of that goodneſs which governs all things, and of GOD's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men; ſo that if we look no farther than this world, we may ſay with David, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily "there is a GOD that judgeth the earth."

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpoſe; that if goodneſs governed the world, and adminiſtred the affairs of it, good and evil would not be ſo careleſly and promiſcuouſly diſpenſed; good men would not be ſo great ſufferers, nor wicked men ſo proſperous as many times they are.

But this alſo, if rightly conſidered, is an effect of GOD's goodneſs, and infinite patience to mankind, that "he cauſeth his ſun to riſe, and his rain to fall "upon the juſt and unjuſt;" that, upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confuſion and ruin: this plainly ſhews, that he deſigns this life for the trial

trial of men's virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it; and therefore "he ſuffers men "to walk in their own ways," without any great check and controul, and reſerves the main bulk of rewards and puniſhments for another world: So that all this is ſo far from being any objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of GOD's immenſe goodneſs, and infinite patience, that the world ſubſiſts and continues, and that he permits men to take their courſe, for the fuller trial of them, and the clearer and more effectual declaration of his juſtice, in the rewards and puniſhments of another life. SERM. CXLIV.

Fourthly and laſtly, the goodneſs of GOD to mankind moſt gloriouſly appears, in the proviſion he hath made for our eternal happineſs. What the happineſs of man ſhould have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by wilful tranſgreſſions we have forfeited all that happineſs which our natures are capable of. In this lapſed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodneſs and mercy of GOD was pleaſed to employ his wiſdom for our recovery, and to reſtore us not only to a new but a greater capacity of glory and happineſs. And in order to this, the ſon of GOD aſſumes our nature for the recovery and redemption of man; and the pardon of ſin is purchaſed for us by his blood; eternal life, and the way to it, are clearly diſcovered to us. GOD is pleaſed to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and aſſiſtance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it; and graciouſly to accept of our faith and repentance, of our ſincere reſolutions and endeavours of holineſs and obedience,

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for perfect and complete righteouſneſs, for his ſake who "fulfilled all righteouſneſs."

This is the great and amazing goodneſs of GOD to mankind, that when we were in open rebellion againſt him, he ſhould entertain thoughts of peace and reconciliation; and when he paſſed by the fallen angels, he ſhould ſet his affection and love upon the ſinful and miſerable ſons of men. And "herein is "the love of GOD to men perfected," that as he hath made all creatures, both above us, and below us, ſubſervient and inſtrumental to our ſubſiſtence and preſervation; ſo, for the ranſom of our ſouls from eternal ruin and miſery, "he hath not ſpared "his own ſon, but hath given him up to death for "us;" him, whom "he hath commanded all the "angels of GOD to worſhip," and to whom he hath made ſubject all creatures in heaven and earth; him, "who made the world," and "who upholds "all things by the word of his power, who is the "brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of "his perſon."

And after ſuch a ſtupendous inſtance as this, what may we not reaſonably hope for, and promiſe our ſelves from the divine goodneſs? So the apoſtle hath taught us to reaſon; Rom. viii. 32. "He that ſpar-"ed not his own ſon, but delivered him up for us "all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us "all things?"

SER-

SERMON CXLV.

The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

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IN handling this argument, I proceeded in this method:

Firſt, to conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs.

Secondly, to ſhew that this perfection of goodneſs belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, I conſidered the effects of the divine goodneſs, under theſe heads:

I. The univerſal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and deſign of the things created by him, and his preſervation, and providing for the welfare and happineſs of them.

II. I conſidered more particularly the goodneſs of GOD to mankind, of which I gave theſe four inſtances.

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained ſo many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciſeth ſo peculiar a providence over us above the reſt, that though he is ſaid to be good to all, he is only ſaid to love the ſons of men.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happineſs. There only now remains the

Fourth and laſt particular to be ſpoken to, which was, to anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to

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contradict and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of GOD; and they are many, and have (ſome of them eſpecially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great conſideration and care, to give a clear and ſatisfactory anſwer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of; the goodneſs of GOD being one of the moſt certain and unqueſtionable truths in the world. I ſhall mention thoſe which are moſt conſiderable and obvious, and do almoſt of themſelves ſpring up in every man's mind, and they are theſe four; the firſt of them more general, the other three more particuliar.

Firſt, If GOD be ſo exceeding good, whence comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or ſuffering, and (which is the greateſt of all others, and indeed the cauſe of them) evil of ſin?

Secondly, the doctrine of abſolute reprobation; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin or fault: this ſeems notoriouſly to contradict, not only the notion of infinite goodneſs, but any competent meaſure and degree of goodneſs.

Thirdly, the eternal miſery and puniſhment of men for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs which we ſuppoſe to be in GOD.

Fourthly, the inſtances of GOD's great ſeverity to mankind, upon occaſion, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of GOD, hath, in ſeveral ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations; and here I ſhall confine myſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being the moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equal to any that are to be met with in hiſtory;

hiſtory; as the early and univerſal degeneracy of mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites, by the expreſs command of GOD; and laſtly, the great calamities which befel the Jewiſh nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.

Theſe are the objections againſt the goodneſs of GOD, which I ſhall ſeverally conſider, and, with all the brevity and clearneſs I can, endeavour to return a particular anſwer to them.

The firſt objection, which I told you is more general, is this; if GOD be ſo exceeding good, whence then comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds? It is evident beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world. "The whole world "lies in evil," ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, "lies in the wick-"edneſs, (ſo our tranſlation renders it) is involved in ſin; but by the article and oppoſition, St. John ſeems to intend the devil: "We know, ſays he, "that we are of GOD, and the whole world," ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, "is ſubject to the evil one," and under his power and dominion. Which way ſoever we render it, it ſignifies, that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now, can evil come from a good GOD? "Out of the ſame mouth proceedeth "bleſſing and curſing. Doth a fountain ſend forth "at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter? This "cannot be," as St. James ſpeaks in another caſe. But all evils that are in the world, muſt either be directly procured by the divine providence, or permitted to happen; and next to the cauſing and procuring

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ing of evil, it ſeems to be contrary to the goodneſs of GOD, to permit that there ſhould be any ſuch thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Anſwer. To give an account of this: it was an ancient doctrine of ſome of the moſt ancient nations, that there were two firſt cauſes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad; which, among the Perſians, were called Oromaſdes and Arimanius; among the Egyptians, Oſiris and Typhon; among the Chaldeans, good or bad planets; among the Greeks Ζεὺς and Ἅιδης: Plutarch expreſly ſays, that the good principle was called GOD, and the bad, demon, or the devil; in conformity to which ancient traditions, the Manichees (a ſad ſect of Chriſtians) ſet up two principles, the one infinitely good, which they ſuppoſed to be the original cauſe of all good that is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they aſcribed all the evils that are in the world.

But beſides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpoſe to ſuppoſe two oppoſite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we conſider, that what is infinitely evil, muſt be infinitely imperfect, and conſequently infinitely weak; and for that reaſon, though never ſo miſchievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and fooliſh, would neither be in a capacity to contrive miſchief, nor to execute it. But admit that a being infinitely miſchievous were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerful, yet it could do no evil; becauſe the oppoſite principle of infinite goodneſs, being alſo infinitely wiſe and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands: ſo that, upon this ſuppoſition, the notion of a deity would

would ſignify juſt nothing, and by virtue of the eternal oppoſition and equality of theſe two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and, being an equal match for one another, inſtead of being two deities, they would be two idols, able to do neither good nor evil. SERM. CXLV.

But to return a more diſtinct and ſatisfactory anſwer to this objection: there are three ſorts of evil in the world; the evil of imperfection; the evil of affliction and ſuffering; and the evil of ſin.

And 1ſt, for the evil of imperfection, I mean, natural imperfections; theſe are not ſimply and abſolutely, but only comparatively evil: now comparative evil is but a leſs degree of goodneſs; and it is not at all inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD, that ſome creatures ſhould be leſs good than others, that is, imperfect in compariſon of them; nay, it is very agreeable both to the goodneſs and wiſdom of GOD, that there ſhould be this variety in the creatures, and that they ſhould be of ſeveral degrees of perfection, being made for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, and to be ſubſervient to one another, provided they all contribute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is neceſſarily involved in the very nature and condition of a creature, as that it derives it's being from another, and neceſſarily depends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewiſe of neceſſity finite and limited in it's nature and perfections; and as for thoſe creatures which are leſs perfect than others, this alſo, that there ſhould be degrees of perfection, is neceſſary, upon ſuppoſition, that the wiſdom of GOD thinks fit to diſplay itſelf in variety of creatures of ſeveral kinds and ranks. For though, comparing the creatures with one another, the angelical nature is beſt, and moſt perfect; yet it

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is abſolutely beſt, that there ſhould be other creatures beſides angels. There are many parts of the creation which are raſhly and inconſiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as ſome noxious and hurtful creatures, which yet in other reſpects, and to ſome purpoſes, may be very uſeful, and againſt the harm and miſchief whereof we are ſufficiently armed, by ſuch means of defence, and ſuch antidotes, as reaſon and experience are able to find and furniſh us withal; and thoſe parts of the world which we think of little or no uſe, as rocks and deſerts, and that vaſt wilderneſs of the ſea, if we conſider things well, are of great uſe to ſeveral very conſiderable purpoſes; or if we can diſcern no other uſe of them, they ſerve at leaſt to help our dulneſs, and to make us more attentively to conſider, and to admire the perfection and uſefulneſs of the reſt; at the worſt, they may ſerve for foils to ſet off the wiſe order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expreſſeth it very well) they may be like a blackmoor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

2dly, For the evils of affliction and ſuffering; and theſe either befal brute creatures, or men endowed with reaſon and conſideration.

1ſt, For thoſe which befal the brute creatures; thoſe ſufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greateſt they meet withal are from men, or upon their account, for whoſe ſake they were chiefly made, and to whoſe reaſonable uſe and gentle dominion they are conſigned.

It is neceſſary, from the very nature of theſe creatures, that they ſhould be paſſive, and liable to pain; and yet it doth in no wiſe contradict either the wiſdom or goodneſs of GOD to make ſuch creatures, becauſe

becauſe all theſe pains are, for the moſt part, fully recompenſed by the pleaſure theſe creatures find in life; and that they have ſuch a pleaſure and happineſs in life, is evident, in that all creatures, notwithſtanding the miſeries they endure, are ſtill fond of life, and unwilling to part with it: no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever ſeeks the deſtruction of itſelf; and ſince all brute creatures are ſo loth to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate whether they would be, or not, they would chuſe to come into being, even upon theſe hard conditions. SERM. CXLV.

But however that be, this we are ſure of, that they ſuffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we, who are their natural lords, having depraved our ſelves firſt, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the ſcripture tells us, that they ſuffer for our ſakes, and that "the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage" for the ſin of man. And this is not unreaſonable, that being made principally for man, they ſhould ſuffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and eſtate; not as a puniſhment to them (which, under the notion of puniſhment, they are not capable of) but as a puniſhment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and leſs uſeful and ſerviceable to him for whom they were made; ſo that the ſufferings of the creatures below us are, in a great meaſure, to be charged upon us, under whoſe dominion GOD hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and ſufferings which befal men, theſe are not natural and of GOD's making, but the reſult and fruit of our own doings, the effects and conſequences of the ill uſe of our own liberty, and free choice; and GOD does not willingly

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ſend them upon us, but we wilfully pull them down upon ourſelves; for "he doth not afflict willingly, "nor grieve the children of men," as the prophet tells us, Lam. iii. 33. Or, as it is in the Wiſdom of Solomon, Chap. i. 12, 13. "GOD made not death, "neither hath he pleaſure in the deſtruction of the "living; but men pull deſtruction upon themſelves, "with the works of their own hands." All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of our own ſin, as poverty, and diſgrace, pains, diſeaſes, and death, which are ſometimes more immediately inflicted upon men by a viſible providence and hand of GOD, but are uſually brought upon us by our ſelves, in the natural courſe and order of things; or they are the effects of other men's ſins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetouſneſs, by the malice and cruelty of others: and theſe evils, though they are procured and cauſed by others, yet they are deſerved by ourſelves; and though they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and conſider them as directed and diſpoſed by the providence of GOD; as David did when Shimei curſed him; "GOD (ſaith he) hath bid him "curſe David," though it immediately proceeded from Shimei's inſolence and ill-nature.

Now upon the ſuppoſition of ſin, the evils of affliction and ſuffering are good, becauſe they are of great uſe to us, and ſerve to very good ends and purpoſes.

1. As they are the proper puniſhments of ſin. Evil is good to them that do evil; that is, it is fit and proper, juſt and due: Pſal cvii. 17. "Fools, becauſe "of their tranſgreſſion, and becauſe of their iniqui-"ties, are afflicted." And it is fit they ſhould be ſo; crooked to crooked is ſtreight and right. "A rod

" for the back of fools, ſaith Solomon;" and elſe-
where, " GOD hath made every thing for that which
" is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man."

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and ſuffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a ſenſe of their ſin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preſerve them from eternal miſery; and not only good to the perſon that ſuffers, but likewiſe to others, to deter and affright them from the like ſins; to prevent the contagion of ſin, and to ſtop the progreſs of iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worſe miſchiefs might enſue; and they are good to good men, to awaken and rouze them out of their ſecurity, to make them know GOD and themſelves better; they are almoſt a neceſſary diſcipline for the beſt of men, much more for evil and depraved diſpoſitions; and we might as reaſonably expect that there ſhould be no rod in a ſchool, as that there ſhould be no ſuffering and afflictions in the world.

3dly, As they are the occaſions and matter of many virtues. GOD teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and ſufferings, charity by perſecution, and pity and compaſſion to others by grievous pains upon our ſelves. The benefit of afflictions, to them that make a wiſe uſe of them, is unſpeakable; they are grievous in themſelves, " nevertheleſs (ſaith the apoſtle to the Hebrews) " they bring forth the peaceable fruits of " righteouſneſs, to them that are exerciſed there-
" with." David gives a great teſtimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience; Pſal. cxix. 76. " Before I was afflicted,
" I went aſtray, but now have I kept thy word."

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And ver. 71. "It is good for me that I have been "afflicted, that I might learn thy ſtatutes."

4thly, The evils of ſuffering, patiently ſubmitted to, and decently borne, do greatly contribute to the increaſe of our happineſs. All the perſecutions and ſufferings of good men in this life, "do work for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glo- "ry." And if they contribute to our greater good and happineſs at laſt, they are good. The glorious reward of the ſufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodneſs and juſtice of the divine providence from all thoſe miſts and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from thoſe objections which are now raiſed againſt it, upon account of the afflictions and ſufferings of good men in this life, which "are not worthy to "be compared with the glory which ſhall be reveal- "ed in them."

III. As for the evil of ſin, which is the great difficulty of all. How is it conſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD, to permit ſo great an evil as this to come into the world? For anſwer to this, I deſire theſe two things may be conſidered:

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wiſdom or goodneſs of GOD, to make a creature of ſuch a frame, as to be capable of having it's obedience tried, in order to the reward of it; which could not be, unleſs ſuch a creature were made mutable, and, by the good or bad uſe of it's liberty, capable of obeying or diſobeying the laws of his creator: for where there is no poſſibility of ſinning, there can be no trial of our virtue and obedience; and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodneſs of GOD towards us is ſufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happineſs, and gave

us

us ſufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wiſe contradict his goodneſs, that he does not, by his omnipotency, interpoſe to prevent our ſin: for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or puniſhment, according to the good or bad uſe of his own free choice. It is ſufficient that GOD made man good at firſt, though mutable, and that he had a power to have continued ſo, though he wilfully determined himſelf to evil: this acquits the goodneſs of GOD, that "he made man upright, but he found out" to himſelf "many inventions."

2. If there had not been ſuch an order and rank of creatures as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifeſtation of GOD's goodneſs in a way of mercy and patience: ſo that though GOD be not the author of the ſins of men, yet, in caſe of their wilful tranſgreſſion and diſobedience, the goodneſs of GOD hath a fair opportunity of diſcovering itſelf, in his patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, and in his merciful care and proviſion for their recovery out of that miſerable ſtate. And this may ſuffice for anſwer to the firſt objection, if GOD be ſo good, whence then comes evil?

The ſecond objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, is from the doctrine of abſolute reprobation: by which I mean the decreeing the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin and fault. This ſeems not only notoriouſly to contradict the notion of infinite goodneſs, but to be utterly inconſiſtent with the leaſt meaſure and degree of goodneſs. Indeed, if by reprobation were only meant, that GOD, in his own infinite knowledge foreſees the ſins and wicked-

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wickedneſs of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himſelf, what in his word he hath ſo plainly declared, that he will puniſh impenitent ſinners with everlaſting deſtruction; or if by reprobation be meant, that GOD hath not elected all mankind, that is, abſolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to ſalvation: neither of theſe notions of reprobation is any ways inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD; for he may foreſee the wickedneſs of men, and determine to puniſh it, without any impeachment of his goodneſs: he may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the ſame degree: if GOD pleaſe to bring any infallibly to ſalvation, this is tranſcendent goodneſs; but if he put all others into a capacity of it, and uſe all neceſſary and fitting means to make them happy, and, after all this, any fall ſhort of happineſs through their own wilful fault and obſtinacy; theſe men are evil and cruel to themſelves, but GOD hath been very good and merciful to them.

But if by reprobation be meant, either that GOD hath decreed, without reſpect to the ſins of men, their abſolute ruin and miſery; or that he hath decreed that they ſhall inevitably ſin and periſh; it cannot be denied, but that ſuch a reprobation as this doth clearly overthrow all poſſible notion of goodneſs. I have told you, that the true and only notion of goodneſs in GOD is this, that it is a propenſion and diſpoſition of the divine nature, to communicate being and happineſs to his creatures: but ſurely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a diſpoſition to make them happy, than an abſolute decree, and a peremptory reſolution to make them miſerable. GOD is infinitely better than the beſt of men, and yet none can poſſibly think that man a good man, who ſhould abſolutely reſolve to diſinherit and deſtroy his children,

children, without the foreſight and conſideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodneſs of GOD; but it is not an eaſy matter to deviſe to ſay any thing worſe than this of the devil. SERM. CXLV.

But it is ſaid, reprobation is an act of ſovereignty in GOD, and therefore not to be meaſured by the common rules of goodneſs. But it is contrary to goodneſs, and plainly inconſiſtent with it; and we muſt not attribute ſuch a ſovereignty to GOD, as contradicts his goodneſs; for if the ſovereignty of GOD may break in at pleaſure upon his other attributes, then it ſignifies nothing to ſay, that GOD is good, and wiſe, and juſt, if his ſovereignty may at any time act contrary to theſe perfections.

Now if the doctrine of abſolute reprobation, and the goodneſs of GOD, cannot poſſibly ſtand together, the queſtion is, which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. Paul determines in another caſe, concerning the truth and fidelity of GOD, will equally hold concerning his goodneſs: "Let GOD "be good, and every man a liar." The doctrine of abſolute reprobation is no part of the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the rule of our faith. If ſome great divines have held this doctrine, not in oppoſition to the goodneſs of GOD, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the ſchools of the greateſt divines be called in queſtion, than the goodneſs of GOD, which, next to his being, is the greateſt and cleareſt truth in the world.

Thirdly, it is farther objected, that the eternal puniſhment of men, for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs, which we ſuppoſe to be in GOD. This

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This objection I have fully anſwered, in a diſcourſe upon St. Matthew, chap. xxv. 46. and therefore ſhall proceed to the

Fourth and laſt objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, from ſundry inſtances of GOD's ſeverity to mankind, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of GOD, have in ſeveral ages either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I ſhall confine my ſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being moſt known, and moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other hiſtory; ſuch are the early and univerſal degeneracy of all mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites by the expreſs command of GOD; and, laſtly, the great calamities which befel the Jewiſh nation, eſpecially the final ruin and diſperſion of them at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Theſe, and the like inſtances of GOD's ſeverity, ſeem to call in queſtion his goodneſs.

Againſt theſe ſevere and dreadful inſtances of GOD's ſeverity, it might be a ſufficient vindication of his goodneſs to ſay in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and moſt of them, after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readineſs in GOD to have prevented or removed them, upon repentance; all which are great inſtances of the goodneſs of GOD: but yet, for the clearer manifeſtation of the divine goodneſs, I ſhall conſider them particularly, and as briefly as I can.

1. As

SERM. CLXV.

1. As for the tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents, and the diſmal conſequences of it to all their poſterity: This is a great depth, and though the ſcripture mentions it, yet it ſpeaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we muſt not attempt "to be wiſe above what is written." Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful diſobedience to a very plain and eaſy command; and that, in the puniſhment of it, GOD mitigated the extremity of the ſentence (which was preſent death) by granting our firſt parents the reprieve of almoſt a thouſand years: and as to the conſequences of it to their poſterity, GOD did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and though he removed them out of that happy ſtate and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth: and, which is certainly the moſt glorious inſtance of divine goodneſs that ever was, he was pleaſed to make the fall and miſery of man, the happy occaſion of ſending his ſon in our nature, for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell. So the apoſtle tells us at large, Rom. v. that the grace of GOD, by JESUS CHRIST, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than the ſin and diſobedience of our firſt parents did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, though it look very ſevere, yet if we conſider it well, we may plainly diſcern much of goodneſs in it; it was upon great provocation, by the univerſal corruption and depravation of mankind: "The earth was filled with vio-"lence, and all fleſh had corrupted it's ways; the "wickedneſs of man was great upon the earth, and "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was

5.

SERM. CXLIV.

" only evil continually ;" which is not a deſcription of original ſin, but of the actual and improved wickedneſs of mankind : and yet when the wickedneſs of men was come to this height, GOD gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, " when the patience of GOD waited in " the days of Noah," for the ſpace of " an hundred " and twenty years ;" at laſt, when nothing would reclaim them, and almoſt the whole race of mankind were become ſo very bad, that it is ſaid, " it repent- " ed the LORD that he had made man upon the " earth, and it grieved him at his heart ;" when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue ſo, GOD, in pity to mankind, and to put a ſtop to their growing wickedneſs and guilt, ſwept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preſerved from this contagion, to be a new ſeminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expreſſeth it, *mundi melioris origo*, the ſource and original of a better race.

3. For that terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimſtone from heaven, it was not brought upon them till " the cry of their ſin was " great, and gone up to heaven ;" till by their unnatural luſts they had provoked ſupernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms GOD was pleaſed to condeſcend to Abraham for the ſparing of them ; if in thoſe five cities there had been found " but ten righteous perſons, he " would not have deſtroyed them for thoſe ten's ſake." So that we may ſay with the apoſtle, " Behold the " goodneſs and ſeverity of GOD !" Here was wonderful goodneſs mixed with this great ſeverity.

4. For the extirpation of the Canaanites, by the expreſs command of GOD, which hath ſuch an appearance

pearance of ſeverity, it is to be conſidered, that this vengeance was not executed upon them, till they were grown ripe for it. GOD ſpared them for above four hundred years, for ſo long their growing impiety is taken notice of, Gen. xviii. 28. where it is ſaid, That "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full:" GOD did not proceed to cut them off, till their caſe was deſperate, paſt all hopes of recovery, till "the "land was defiled with abominations," and ſurcharged with wickedneſs, to that degree, as "to "ſpue out it's inhabitants;" as is expreſly ſaid, Levit. xviii. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to ſpare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and miſery to themſelves.

Fifthly and laſtly, as for the great calamities which GOD brought upon the Jews, eſpecially in their final ruin and diſperſion at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; not to inſiſt upon the known hiſtory of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their deſpiteful uſage of GOD's prophets, whom he ſent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance; of their obſtinate refuſal to receive correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that GOD could uſe; for all which provocations, he at laſt delivered them into their enemies hands, to carry them away captive: not to inſiſt upon this, I ſhall only conſider their final deſtruction by the Romans, which though it be dreadfully ſevere, beyond any example of hiſtory, yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, till they had, as it were, extorted it, by the moſt obſtinate impenitency and unbelief, in "rejecting the counſel of GOD againſt themſelves," and reſiſting ſuch means as would have brought Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah to repentance;

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till they had deſpiſed the doctrine of life and ſalvation, delivered to them by the ſon of GOD, and confirmed from heaven by the cleareſt and greateſt miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and ſlain the ſon of GOD, and the SAVIOUR of the world. Nay, even after this greateſt of ſins that ever was committed, GOD waited for their repentance forty years, to ſee if in that time they would be brought to a ſenſe of their ſins, and "to know the things which be- "longed to their peace." And no wonder if, after ſuch provocations, and ſo much patience, and ſo obſtinate an impenitency, the goodneſs of GOD at laſt gave way to his juſtice, and "wrath came upon "them to the utmoſt."

So that all theſe inſtances, rightly conſidered, are rather commendations of the divine goodneſs, than juſt and reaſonable objections againſt it; and notwithſtanding the ſeverity of them, it is evident that GOD is good, from the primary inclinations of his nature; and ſevere only upon neceſſity, and in caſe of juſt provocation. And to be otherwiſe, not to puniſh inſolent impiety and incorrigible wickedneſs in a ſevere and remarkable manner, would not be goodneſs, but a fond indulgence; not patience, but ſtupidity; not mercy to mankind, but cruelty: becauſe it would be an encouragement to them to do more miſchief, and to bring greater miſery upon themſelves.

So that if we ſuppoſe GOD to be holy and juſt, as well as good, there is nothing in any of theſe inſtances, but what is very conſiſtent with all that goodneſs which we can ſuppoſe to be in a holy, and wiſe, and juſt governor, who is a declared enemy to ſin, and is reſolved to give all fitting diſcountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is neceſ-

ſary,

ſary, in kindneſs and compaſſion to the reſt of mankind, that ſome ſhould be made remarkable inſtances of GOD's ſeverity; that the puniſhment of a few may be a warning to all, "that they may hear and fear," and, by avoiding the like ſins, may prevent the like ſeverity upon themſelves.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the goodneſs of GOD; the conſideration whereof is fruitful of many excellent and uſeful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty: but theſe I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON CXLVI.

The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

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I Have made ſeveral diſcourſes upon this argument, of the goodneſs of GOD; ſhewing what it is; on what accounts we aſcribe it to GOD; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind; and, in the laſt place, conſidered the ſeveral objections which ſeem to lie againſt it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the conſideration whereof is ſo fruitful of uſeful inferences in relation both to our comfort and duty. And,

I. This ſhews us the prodigious folly and unreaſonableneſs of atheiſm. Moſt of the atheiſm that is in the world, doth not ſo much conſiſt in a firm perſuaſion

ſuaſion that there is no GOD, as in vain wiſhes and deſires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happineſs to them, and that they ſhould be in a much better condition, if there were no GOD, than if there be one. *Nemo Deum non eſſe credit, niſi cui Deum non eſſe expedit*, "no man is apt to diſbelieve "a GOD, but he whoſe intereſt it is that there ſhould "be none." And if we could ſee into the hearts of wicked men we ſhould find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a GOD, he is juſt and will puniſh ſin; that he is infinite in power, and not to be reſiſted, and therefore kills them with his terror ſo often as they think of him: hence they apprehend it their intereſt that there ſhould be no GOD, and wiſh there were none, and thence are apt to cheriſh in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at laſt endeavour to impoſe upon themſelves by vain reaſonings, and to ſuppreſs the belief of a GOD, and to ſtifle their natural apprehenſions and fears of him. So that it is not *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, "fear "that firſt made gods;" but the fear which bad men have of divine power and juſtice, that firſt tempted them to the diſbelief of him.

But were not theſe men as fooliſh as they are wicked, they would wiſh with all their hearts there were a GOD, and be glad to believe ſo: and the pſalmiſt gives them their true character, who can entertain any ſuch thoughts or wiſhes; Pſal. xiv. 1. "The "fool hath ſaid in his heart, there is no GOD:" for they are fools who do not underſtand nor conſult their true intereſt: and if this be true which I have ſaid concerning the goodneſs of GOD; if this be his nature, to deſire and procure the happineſs of his creatures; whoever underſtands the true nature of GOD and his own true intereſt, cannot but wiſh there were

a GOD, and be glad of any argument to prove it, and rejoice to find it true; as children are glad of a kind and tender father, and as ſubjects rejoice in a wiſe and good prince. SERM. CXLVI.

The goodneſs of GOD gives us a lovely character of him, makes him ſo good a father, ſo gracious a governor of men, that if there were no ſuch being in the world, it were infinitely deſirable to mankind that there ſhould be: he is ſuch an one, *qualem omnes cuperent, ſi deeſſet*, "as if he were wanting, all men "ought to wiſh for." The being of GOD is ſo comfortable, ſo convenient, ſo neceſſary to the felicity of mankind, that (as Tully admirably ſays) *Dii immortales ad uſum hominum fabricati penè videantur*, "if GOD were not a neceſſary being of himſelf, he "might almoſt ſeem to be made on purpoſe for the "uſe and benefit of men:" ſo that atheiſm is not only an inſtance of the moſt horrible impiety, but of the greateſt ſtupidity; and for men to glory in their diſbelief of a GOD, is like the rejoicing and triumph of a furious and beſotted multitude, in the murder of a wiſe and good prince, the greateſt calamity and confuſion that could poſſibly have befallen them.

If the evidence of GOD's being were not ſo clear as it is, yet the conſideration of his goodneſs ought to check all inclination to atheiſm and infidelity; for if he be as good as he is repreſented to us; both by natural light and divine revelation, (and he is ſo, as ſure as he is) if he tender our welfare, and deſire our happineſs, as much as we ourſelves can do, and uſe all wiſe ways and proper means to bring it about, then it is plainly every man's intereſt, even thine, O ſinner! to whom, after all thy provocations, he is willing to be reconciled, that there ſhould be ſuch a being

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being as GOD is; and whenever thou comeſt to thy ſelf, thou wilt be ſenſible of thy want of him, and thy "ſoul will thirſt for GOD, even the living GOD, "and pant after him as the hart pants after the wa-"ter brooks;" in the day of thy affliction and calamity, "when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon "thee," thou wilt flee to GOD for refuge, and ſhelter thy ſelf under his protection, and wouldeſt not, for all the world, but there were ſuch a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo ſanus timet* (ſays Seneca) *furor eſt metuere ſalutaria*; "no man "in his wits is afraid there is a GOD: it is a mad-"neſs to fear that which is ſo much for our benefit "and advantage." Human nature is conſcious to itſelf of it's own weakneſs and inſufficiency, and of it's neceſſary dependance upon ſomething without itſelf for it's happineſs, and therefore, in great extremity and diſtreſs, the atheiſt himſelf hath naturally recourſe to him; and he who denied and rejected him in his proſperity, clings to him in adverſity, as his "only ſupport and preſent help in time of trou-"ble." And this is a ſure indication, that theſe men, after all their endeavours to impoſe upon themſelves, have not been able wholly to extinguiſh in their minds the belief of GOD, and his goodneſs; nay, it is a ſign, that at the bottom of their hearts they have a firm perſuaſion of his goodneſs, when, after all their inſolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply themſelves to him for mercy and help, in time of need; and therefore our hearts ought to riſe with indignation againſt thoſe who go about to perſuade the belief of a thing ſo prejudicial to our intereſt, to take away "the light of our eyes, "and the breath of our noſtrils," and to rob us of all the comfort and ſupport, which the belief of an in-

infinite power, conducted by infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, is apt to afford to mankind. SERM. CXLVI.

II. We ſhould take great care of perverting and abuſing this great goodneſs by vain confidence and preſumption. This is a provocation of an high nature, which the ſcripture calls, "turning the grace of GOD "into wantonneſs;" making that an encouragement to ſin, which is one of the ſtrongeſt arguments in the world againſt it. GOD is infinitely good and merciful: but we muſt not therefore think, that he is fond and indulgent to our faults; but, on the contrary, becauſe he is good, he cannot but hate evil. So the ſcripture every where tells us, that "he is of purer "eyes than to behold iniquity; that the face of the "LORD is againſt them that do evil: he is not a "GOD that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall "evil dwell with him: the fooliſh ſhall not ſtand "in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniqui-"ty." He is ready to ſhew mercy to thoſe who are qualified for it by repentance, and reſolution of a better courſe: but as long as we continue impenitent, GOD is implacable, and will deal with us according to the tenor of his laws, and the deſert of our doings. Deſpair is a great ſin, but preſumption is a greater; deſpair doubts of the goodneſs of GOD, but preſumption abuſeth it; deſpair diſbelieves, but preſumption perverts the beſt thing in the world to a quite contrary purpoſe from what it was intended.

III. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs is a mighty comfort and relief to our minds, under all our fears and troubles. Great are the fears and jealouſies of many devout minds concerning GOD's love to them, and their everlaſting condition; which are commonly founded in one of theſe two cauſes, a melancholy temper or miſtaken notions and apprehenſi-

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ons of GOD; and very often theſe two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy, as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a diſeaſe not to be cured by reaſon and argument, but by phyſick and time: but the miſtakes which men have entertained concerning GOD, if they be not ſet on and heightened by melancholy, (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true repreſentation of the goodneſs of GOD, confirmed by reaſon and ſcripture. Many good men have had very hard and injurious thoughts of GOD inſtilled into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not ſincerely deſire the happineſs of his creatures, but had from all eternity decreed to make the greateſt part of mankind, with a ſecret purpoſe and deſign to make them miſerable, and, conſequently, were not ſerious and in good earneſt in his invitations and exhortations of ſinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if ſuch jealouſies as theſe concerning GOD, make men doubtful whether GOD love them, and very ſcrupulous and anxious about their everlaſting condition.

I have already told you that theſe harſh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reaſon or ſcripture; that GOD earneſtly deſires our happineſs, and affords us ſufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good-will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his deareſt child; in compariſon of which, the greateſt affection of men to thoſe whom they love beſt, is "but as the drop of the bucket, as the very ſmall duſt "upon the balance." If we have right apprehenſions of GOD's goodneſs, we can have no temptation to deſpair of his kind and merciful intentions to us, provided we be but careful of our duty to him, and

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do ſincerely repent and forſake our ſins. Plainer declarations no words can make, than thoſe we meet with in the holy ſcriptures, that "GOD hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he "ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live;" that "he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come "to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he is long "ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould "periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance;" that "he that confeſſeth and forſaketh his ſin, ſhall "have mercy;" that "if the wicked forſake his "ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, "and return unto the LORD, he will have mercy, "and will abundantly pardon."

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the conſideration of GOD's goodneſs is a firm ground of conſolation to us, giving us aſſurance, that GOD will either prevent them by his providence, or ſupport us under them, or reſcue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happineſs in this world or the next. St. Paul ſpeaks of it as the firm belief and perſuaſion of all good men, that, in the iſſue, all afflictions ſhould prove to their advantage. "We know (ſays he) that all things ſhall work to-"gether for good to them that love GOD." And one of the greateſt evidences of our love to GOD, is a firm belief and perſuaſion of his goodneſs: if we believe his goodneſs, we cannot but love him; and if we love him, "all things ſhall work together for our good."

And this is a great cordial to thoſe who are under grievous perſecutions and ſufferings, which is the caſe of our brethren in a neighbouring nation, and may come to be ours, GOD knows how ſoon. But though the malice of men be great, and backed with a power not to be controlled by any viſible means,

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and therefore likely to continue; yet the goodneſs of GOD is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himſelf, when he was perſecuted by Saul, Pſal. lii. 1. "Why boaſteth thou thy ſelf in miſ-"chief, O mighty man? the goodneſs of GOD en-"dureth continually." The perſecution which Saul raiſed againſt him was very powerful, and laſted a long time; but he comforts himſelf with this, that "the goodneſs of GOD endures for ever."

IV. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a powerful motive and argument to ſeveral duties.

1. To the love of GOD. And this is the moſt proper and natural effect and operation of the goodneſs of GOD upon our minds. Several of the divine attributes are very awful, but goodneſs is amiable; and without this nothing elſe is ſo. Power and wiſdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodneſs can challenge our love and affection. Goodneſs is amiable for itſelf, though no benefit and advantage ſhould from thence redound to us; but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when the riches of GOD's goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance, are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodneſs, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for; this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for itſelf. We cannot but love him who is good, and does us good; whoſe goodneſs extends to all his creatures, but is exerciſed in ſo peculiar a manner towards the ſons of men, that it is called love; and if GOD vouchſafe to love us, well may this be the "firſt and great commandment, Thou ſhalt love the lord thy GOD with "all thine heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all "thy mind."

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2. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs is likewiſe an argument to us to fear him; not as a ſlave does his maſter, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid is he to offend him. "There is forgiveneſs with thee (ſaith "the pſalmiſt) that thou mayeſt be feared:" becauſe GOD is ready to forgive, we ſhould be afraid to offend. "Men ſhall fear the LORD and his good-"neſs:" (ſaith the prophet) Hoſea iii. 5. And, indeed, nothing is more to be dreaded, than deſpiſed goodneſs, and abuſed patience, which turns into fury and vengeance: "deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his "goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance, "(ſays the apoſtle) and treaſureſt up to thy ſelf wrath "againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the "righteous judgment of GOD?"

3. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a powerful motive to obedience to his laws, and (as the apoſtle expreſſeth it) "to walk worthy of the "LORD unto all well pleaſing, being fruitful in "every good work." This argument Samuel uſeth to the people of Iſrael, to perſuade them to obedience, 1 Sam. xii. 24. "only fear the LORD, and "ſerve him in truth, with all your heart; for con-"ſider how great things he hath done for you."

And, indeed, the laws, which GOD hath given us, are none of the leaſt inſtances of his goodneſs to us, ſince they all tend to our good, and are proper cauſes and means of our happineſs: ſo that in challenging our obedience to his laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is beſt for our ſelves, and does moſt directly conduce to our own welfare and happineſs.

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Conſidering our infinite obligations to GOD, he might have challenged our obedience to the ſevereſt and harſheſt laws he could have impoſed upon us; ſo that as the ſervants ſaid to Naaman, "Had the "prophet bid thee do ſome great thing, would'ſt thou "not have done it? how much more when he hath "only ſaid, waſh and be clean?" If GOD had required of us things very grievous and burthenſom; in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and chearful obedience to ſuch commands: how much more when he hath only ſaid, do this, and be happy? In teſtimony of your love to me, do theſe things which are the greateſt kindneſs and benefit to your ſelves.

4. "The goodneſs of GOD" ſhould "lead men "to repentance." One of the greateſt aggravations of our ſins is, that we offend againſt ſo much goodneſs, and make ſo bad a requital for it; "Do ye "thus requite the LORD, O fooliſh people, and un-"wiſe!" The proper tendency of GOD's goodneſs and patience to ſinners, is to bring them to a ſenſe of their miſcarriage, and to a reſolution of a better courſe. When we reflect upon the bleſſings and favours of GOD, and his continual goodneſs to us, can we chuſe but be aſhamed of our terrible ingratitude and diſobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an ingenuous nature to relent, than the ſenſe of undeſerved kindneſs; that GOD ſhould be ſo good to us, who are evil and unthankful to him; that though we be enemies to him, yet "when we hunger, he feeds "us; when we thirſt, he gives us to drink;" heaping, as it were, "coals of fire on our heads," on purpoſe to melt us into repentance, and to overcome our evil by his goodneſs.

5. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a firm

ground of truſt and confidence. What may we not hope and aſſuredly expect from immenſe and boundleſs goodneſs? If we have right apprehenſions of the goodneſs of GOD, we cannot poſſibly diſtruſt him, or doubt of the performance of thoſe gracious promiſes which he hath made to us; the ſame goodneſs which inclined him to make ſuch promiſes, will effectually ingage him to make them good. If GOD be ſo good as he hath declared himſelf, why ſhould we think that he will not help us in our need, and relieve us in our diſtreſs, and comfort us in our afflictions and ſorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preſerve and deliver us from evil, we may truſt infinite goodneſs. SERM CXLVI.

6. The goodneſs of GOD is, likewiſe, an argument to us to patience and contentedneſs with every condition. If the hand of GOD be ſevere and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be aſſured that it is not without great cauſe that ſo much goodneſs is ſo highly offended and diſpleaſed with us; that he deſigns our good in all the evils he ſends to us, and does not chaſten us for his pleaſure but for our profit; that we are the cauſe of our own ſufferings, and our ſins ſeparate between GOD and us, and withhold good things from us; that, in the final iſſue and reſult of things, "all things ſhall work together for "good" to us; and therefore we ought not to be diſcontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happineſs.

7. Let us imitate the goodneſs of GOD. The higheſt perfection of the beſt and moſt perfect being is worthy to be our pattern: This the ſcripture frequently propoſeth to us; Math. v. 48. "Be ye "therefore perfect, even as your father which is "in

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" in heaven is perfect." How is that? in being good, and kind, and merciful, as GOD is. " But I " ſay unto you (ſays our LORD) love your enemies, " bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that " hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully " uſe you, and perſecute you; that ye may be the " children of your father which is in heaven: for he " maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good, " and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt." And then it follows, " Be ye therefore perfect, even " as your father which is in heaven is perfect." The ſame pattern St. Paul propoſeth to us, Eph. iv. 32. and ch. v. 1. " Be ye kind one to another, tender " hearted; forgiving one another, even as GOD for " CHRIST's ſake hath forgiven you. Be ye there- " fore followers of GOD as dear children, and walk " in love." We cannot in any thing reſemble GOD more, than in goodneſs, and kindneſs, and mercy, and in a readineſs to forgive thoſe who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of GOD, and repreſent it to our minds, that, by the frequent contemplation of it, we may " be tranſ- " formed into the image of the divine goodneſs." Is GOD ſo good to his creatures? with how much greater reaſon ſhould we be ſo to our fellow-creatures? Is GOD good to us? let us imitate his univerſal goodneſs, by endeavouring the good of mankind; and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of GOD. What GOD is to us, and what we would have him ſtill be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of GOD for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reaſon in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pat-

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tern of the divine goodneſs be continually before us, that we may be ſtill faſhioning our ſelves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeneſs and conformity to it.

Laſtly, the conſideration of the divine goodneſs ſhould excite our praiſe and thankfulneſs: This is a great duty, to the performance whereof we ſhould ſummon all the powers and faculties of our ſouls; as the holy Pſalmiſt does, Pſal. ciii. 1, 2. "Bleſs the "LORD, O my ſoul; and all that is within me, "bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the LORD, O my ſoul, "and forget not all his benefits." And we ſhould invite all others to the ſame work, as the ſame devout Pſalmiſt frequently does; Pſal. cvi. 1. "O give thanks "unto the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy "endureth for ever." And Pſal. cvii. 8. "O that "men would praiſe the LORD for his goodneſs, "and for his wonderful works to the children "of men!"

And we had need to be often called upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardneſs. Neceſſity drives us to prayer, and ſends us to GOD for the ſupply of our wants; but praiſe and thankſgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing ſooner wears off, than the ſenſe of kindneſs and benefits. We are very apt to forget the bleſſings of GOD, not ſo much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greateſt bleſſings, the continuance whereof ſhould continually put us in mind of them, the bleſſings of our beings. So GOD complains of his people, Deut. xxxii. 18. "Of the GOD that formed thee thou "haſt been unmindful;" the dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this viſible world; Job xxxv. 10, 11. "None ſaith, Where is

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" GOD my maker, who teacheth us more than the " beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the " fowls of heaven?" the daily comforts and bleſſings of our lives, which we can continually receive, without almoſt ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So GOD complains by the prophet Hoſea, chap. ii. 8, 9. " She knew not that I gave her corn, and " wine, and oil, and multiplied her ſilver and gold." And is it not ſhameful to ſee how at the moſt plentiful tables, the giving of GOD thanks is almoſt grown out of faſhion? as if men were aſhamed to own from whence theſe bleſſings came. When thanks is all GOD expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? " Do ye thus requite the LORD, " fooliſh people, and unwiſe?" It is juſt with GOD to take away his bleſſings from us, if we deny him this eaſy tribute of praiſe and thankſgiving.

It is a ſign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and imployment of the bleſſed ſpirits above. Therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure our ſelves to that which will be the great buſineſs of all eternity. Let us, with the four and twenty elders in the Revelation, " fall down " before him that ſits on the throne, and worſhip " him that liveth for ever and ever, and caſt our " crowns before the throne" (that is, caſt our ſelves) and aſcribe all glory to GOD, ſaying, " Thou art " worthy, O LORD, to receive glory, and honour, " and power; for thou haſt made all things, and " for thy pleaſure they are, and were created."

" To him therefore, the infinite and inexhauſti- " ble fountain of goodneſs, the father of mercies, and " the GOD of all conſolation, who gave us ſuch

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" excellent beings, having made us little lower than " the angels, and crowned us with glory and ho- " nour; who hath been pleaſed to ſtamp upon us " the image of his own goodneſs, and thereby made " us partakers of a divine nature, communicating " to us not only of the effects of his goodneſs, but " in ſome meaſure and degree of the perfection itſelf; " to him who gives us all things richly to enjoy, " which pertain to life and godlineſs, and hath made " ſuch abundant proviſion, not only for our comfort " and convenience in this preſent life, but for our " unſpeakable happineſs to all eternity; to him who " deſigned this happineſs to us from all eternity, " and whoſe mercy and goodneſs to us endures for " ever; who when by wilful tranſgreſſions and diſ- " obedience we had plunged our ſelves into a ſtate " of ſin and miſery, and had forfeited that happi- " neſs which we were deſigned to, was pleaſed to " reſtore us to a new capacity of it, by ſending his " only ſon to take our nature, with the miſeries and " infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for " us; in a word, to him who is infinitely good to " us, not only contrary to our deſerts, but beyond " our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every " morning, and is patient though we provoke him " every day, who preſerves and provides for us, and " ſpares us continually, who is always willing, al- " ways watchful, and never weary to do us good; " to him be all glory and honour, adoration and " praiſe, love and obedience, now and for ever."

SERMON CXLVII.

The mercy of GOD.

NUMB. xiv. 18.

The LORD *is long-suffering, and of great mercy.*

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I Have considered GOD's goodness in general. There are two eminent branches of it, his patience and mercy. The patience of GOD is his goodness to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deserved punishment: the mercy of GOD is his goodness to them that are, or may be miserable. It is the last of these two I design to discourse of at this time; in doing of which, I shall inquire,

First, what we are to understand by the mercy of GOD.

Secondly, shew you, that this perfection belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, consider the degree of it, that GOD is of great mercy.

First, what we are to understand by the mercy of GOD.

I told you, it is his goodness to them that are in misery, or liable to it; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deserved it. It is mercy, to prevent the misery that we are liable to, and which may befal us, though it be not actually upon us. It is mercy, to defer the misery that we deserve, or mitigate it; and this is, properly, patience and forbearance. It is mercy, to relieve those that are in misery, to support or comfort them. It is mercy,

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to remit the misery we deserve, and, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation to punishment.

Thus the mercy of GOD is usually, in scripture, set forth to us by the affection of pity and compassion; which is an affection that causeth a sensible commotion and disturbance in us, upon the apprehension of some great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that GOD is said, in scripture, to be grieved and afflicted for the miseries of men; his bowels are said to sound, and his heart to turn within him. But though GOD is pleased in this manner to set forth his mercy and tenderness towards us, yet we must take heed how we clothe the divine nature with the infirmities of human passions. We must not measure the perfection of GOD by the expressions of his condescension; and because he stoops to our weakness, level him to our infirmities. When GOD is said to pity us, we must take away the imperfection of this passion, the commotion and disturbance of it, and not imagine any such thing in GOD; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compassion of GOD, without producing the disquiet, do produce the effects of the most sensible pity.

Secondly, that this perfection belongs to GOD.

All the arguments that I used to prove the goodness of GOD, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from scripture and reason, serve to prove that he is merciful; because the mercy of GOD is an eminent branch of his goodness. I will only produce some of those many texts of scripture which attribute this perfection to GOD. Exod. xxxiv. 6. "The LORD, the LORD GOD, merciful and gra-"cious." Deut. iv. 31. "The LORD thy GOD is "a merciful GOD." 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9. "the LORD "your

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" your GOD is gracious and merciful. Neh. ix. 17. " Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." Pſal. xxv. 10. " All the paths of the LORD are mercy." Pſal. lxii. 12. " Unto thee, O LORD, belongeth " mercy." Pſal. ciii. 8. " Merciful and gracious." Pſal. cxxx. 7. " With the LORD there is mercy." And ſo Jer. iii. 12. Joel ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Luke vi. 36. " Be ye therefore merciful, as your father " alſo is merciful." The ſcripture ſpeaks of this as moſt natural to him, 2 Cor. i. 3. he is called " the " Father of mercies." But when he puniſheth, he doth, as it were, relinquiſh his nature, and do a ſtrange work. " The LORD will wait that he may " be gracious," Iſa. xxx. 18. GOD paſſeth by opportunities of puniſhing, but his mercy takes opportunity to diſplay itſelf; " he waits to be gracious." To afflict or puniſh is a work that GOD is unwilling to, that he takes no pleaſure in; Lam. iii. 33. " He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the chil- " dren of men." But mercy is a work that he delights in, Mic. vii. 18. " He delighteth in mercy." When GOD ſhews mercy, he does it with pleaſure and delight; he is ſaid " to rejoice over his people " to do them good." Thoſe attributes that declare GOD's goodneſs, as when he is ſaid to be gracious, or merciful, and long-ſuffering, they ſhew what GOD is in himſelf, and delights to be: thoſe which declare his wrath and ſeverity, ſhew what he is upon provocation, and the occaſion of ſin; not what he chuſeth to be, but what we do, as it were, compel and neceſſitate him to be.

Thirdly, for the degree of it; that GOD is a GOD of great mercy.

The ſcripture doth delight to advance the mercy of GOD, and does uſe great variety of expreſſion to magni-

magnify it. It speaks of the greatness of his mercy; Numb. xiv. 19. "According unto the greatness "of thy mercy," 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. "Let me fall "into the hands of the LORD, for his mercies are "great." It is called an abundant mercy; 1 Pet. i. 3. "According to his abundant mercy." Psal. ciii. 8. he is said to be "plenteous in mercy;" and "rich in mercy." Eph. ii. 4. Psal. v. 7. he speaks of "the multitude of GOD's mercies;" and of the variety of them, Neh. ix. 19. "In thy manifold "mercies thou forsakest them not." So many are they, that we are said to be surrounded and compassed about on every side with them; Psal. ciii. 4. "Who crowneth thee with loving kindness, and "tender mercies."

And yet farther to set forth the greatness of them, the scripture useth all dimensions. Height; Psal lvii. 10. "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens." Nay, higher yet; Psal. cviii. 4. "Thy mercy is great "above the heavens." For the latitude and extent of it, it is as large as the earth, and extends to all the creatures in it; Psal. cxix. 64. "The earth, O "LORD, is full of thy mercy." Psal. cxlv. 9. "His "tender mercies are over all his works." For the length, or duration and continuance of it; Exod. xxxiv. 7. "Laying up mercy in store for thousands "of generations," one after another. Nay, it is of a longer continuance; Psal. cxviii. it is several times repeated, that "his mercy endureth for ever."

And to shew the intense degree of this affection of mercy or pity, the scripture useth several emphatical expressions to set it forth to us. The scripture speaks of the tender mercies of GOD, Psal. xxv. 6. "Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies." Yea, of the multitude of these; Psal. li. 1. "According

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" unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out " my tranſgreſſions." Jam. v. 11. " The LORD is " very pitiful, and of tender mercy." They are called GOD's bowels, which are the tendereſt parts, and apt to yern and ſtir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited; If. lxiii. 15. " Where is " the ſounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies " towards me? are they reſtrained?" Luke i. 78. " Through the tender mercy of our GOD; ſo it is in our tranſlation: but if we render it from the original, it is " through the bowels of the mercies of " our GOD." How doth GOD condeſcend, in thoſe pathetical expreſſions which he uſeth concerning his people? Hoſ. xi. 8. " How ſhall I give thee up, " Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? how " ſhall I make thee as Admah? how ſhall I ſet thee " as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and " my repentings are kindled together." Nay, to expreſs his tender ſenſe of our miſeries and ſufferings, he is repreſented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our ſufferings; Iſa. lxiii. 9. " In all " their afflictions he was afflicted."

The compaſſions of GOD are compared to the tendereſt affections among men: to that of a father towards his children; Pſal. ciii. 13. " Like as a fa- " ther pitieth his children, ſo the LORD pitieth them " that fear him. Nay, to the compaſſions of a mother towards her infant: Iſa. xlix. 50. " Can a woman " forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have " compaſſion on the ſon of her womb?" Yea, ſhe may, it is poſſible, though moſt unlikely: but though a mother may turn unnatural, yet GOD cannot be unmerciful.

In ſhort, the ſcripture doth every where magnify the mercy of GOD, and ſpeak of it with all poſſible advan-

advantage; as if the divine nature, which doth in all perfections excel all others, did in this excel itself. The scripture speaks of it as if GOD was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his constant exercise and employment, so that, in comparison of it, he doth hardly display any other excellency; Psal. xxv. 10. "All the paths of the LORD are mercy;" as if, in this world, GOD had a design to advance his mercy above his other attributes. The mercy of GOD is now in the throne; this is the day of mercy; and GOD doth display it, many times, with a seeming dishonour to his other attributes, his justice, and holiness, and truth. His justice; this makes Job complain of the long life and prosperity of the wicked; Job xxi. 7. "Wherefore do the wicked live, "yea, become old? &c. His holiness; this makes the prophet expostulate with GOD, Hab. i. 13. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and "canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou "upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest "thy tongue?" &c. And the truth of GOD; this makes Jonah complain, as if GOD's mercies were such as did make some reflection upon his truth, Jon. iv. 2. SERM. CXLVII.

But that we may have more distinct apprehensions of the greatness and number of GOD's mercies, I will distribute them into kinds, and rank them under several heads. It is mercy, to prevent those evils and miseries that we are liable to: it is mercy, to defer those evils that we have deserved, or to mitigate them: it is mercy, to support and comfort us when misery is upon us: it is mercy, to deliver us from them: but the greatest mercy of all is, to remit the evil and misery we have deserved, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation

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to punishment. So that the mercy of GOD may be reduced to these five heads.

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miseries which we are liable to, GOD prevents them at a great distance; and when they are coming towards us, he stops them, or turns them another way. The merciful providence of GOD, and those invisible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We seldom take notice of GOD's preventing mercy; we are not apt to be sensible how great a mercy it is to be freed from those straits and necessities, those pains and diseases of body, those inward racks and horrors, which others are pressed withal, and labour under. When any evil or misery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be rescued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that man owe more to his physician, who prevents his sickness and distemper, than he who, after the weakness and languishing, the pains and tortures of several months, is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of GOD, which consists in the deferring or moderating of our deserved punishment. Hence it is, that "slow to anger, and of great mercy," do so often go together. But this I shall speak to hereafter in some particular discourses.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 Cor. i. 3. "The father "of mercies, and the GOD of all comfort." The scripture represents GOD as very merciful, in comforting and supporting those that are afflicted and cast down: hence are those expressions of "putting his "arms under us, bearing us up, speaking comfort-"ably, visiting us with his loving kindness:" which signify GOD's merciful regard to those who are in misery and distress.

IV. His

IV His relieving mercy, in ſupplying thoſe that are in want, and delivering thoſe that are in trouble. GOD doth, many times, exerciſe men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful deſign, to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwiſe bring upon themſelves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing elſe can; they awaken us to a ſenſe of GOD, and of our ſelves, to a conſideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of GOD, to ſeek him, and to inquire after him. GOD doth, as it were, by afflictions, throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. Hoſ. v. 15. "In their affliction they will ſeek me early." Pſal. lxxviii. 34. "When he ſlew them, then they "ſought him, and they returned and inquired early "after GOD." But GOD does not delight in this; "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children "of men." When afflictions have accompliſhed their work, and obtained their end upon us, GOD is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; Iſa. liv. 7, 8. "For a ſmall moment "have I forſaken thee, but with great mercies will "I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face "from thee for a moment, but with everlaſting "kindneſs will I have mercy on thee, ſaith the LORD "thy redeemer."

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatneſs and fulneſs of GOD's mercy appears, becauſe our ſins are great: Pſal. lxxviii. 38. "Being full of compaſſion, "he forgave their iniquity." And the multitude of GOD's mercies, becauſe our ſins are many; Pſal. li. 1. "Have mercy, upon me, O GOD, according "unto thy loving-kindneſs; according to the mul-"titude of thy tender mercies blot out my tranſgreſ-

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" ſions." Exod. xxxiv. 7. he is ſaid " to pardon ini-
" quity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin." How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our ſins, of what kind ſoever! The mercy of GOD to us in pardoning our ſins, is matter of aſtoniſhment and admiration; Mic. vii. 18. " Who is a GOD like unto thee, that pardoneth ini-
" quity!" But eſpecially if we conſider by what means our pardon is procured; by transferring our guilt upon the moſt innocent perſon, the ſon of GOD, and making him " to bear our iniquities," and to ſuffer the wrath of GOD which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of GOD's mercy appears in this diſpenſation; this ſhews the riches of his grace, that he ſhould be at ſo much coſt to purchaſe our pardon; " not with corruptible things, as ſilver and gold; " but with the precious blood of his own ſon;" Eph. i. 6, 7. " To the praiſe of the glory of his " grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the " beloved; in whom we have redemption through " his blood, the forgiveneſs of ſins, according to " the riches of his grace."

Having diſpatched the three particulars I propoſed to be ſpoken to, I ſhall ſhew what uſe we ought to make of this divine attribute.

Uſe 1. We ought with thankfulneſs to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of GOD to us. Let us view it in all it's dimenſions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of GOD to many of us. Thoſe miſeries that lye upon others, it is mercy to us that we eſcaped them. It is mercy that ſpares us. " It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not con-
" ſumed, and becauſe his compaſſions fail not." It is mercy that mitigates our puniſhment, and makes it fall below the deſert of our ſins. It is mercy that comforts

comforts and supports us under any of those evils that lye upon us, and that rescues and delivers us from them. Which way soever we look, we are encompassed with the mercies of GOD; they "com-"passs us about on every side; we are crowned with "loving-kindness, and tender mercies." It is mercy that feeds us, and clothes us, and that preserves us. But, above all, we should thankfully acknowledge and admire the pardoning mercy of GOD; Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3. where David does, as it were, muster up the mercies of GOD, and make a catalogue of them; he sets the pardoning mercy in the front; "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that "is within me bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, "O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who "forgiveth all thy inquities."

If we look into our selves, and consider our own temper and disposition, how void of pity and bowels we are, how cruel, and hard-hearted, and insolent, and revengeful; if we look abroad in the world, and see how "full the earth is of the habitations of "cruelty;" we shall admire the mercy of GOD more, and think our selves more beholden to it. How many things must concur to make our hearts tender and melt our spirits, and stir our bowels, to make us pitiful and compassionate? We seldom pity any, unless they be actually in misery; nor all such neither, unless the misery they lye under be very great; nor then neither, unless the person that suffers be nearly related, and we be some ways concerned in his sufferings; yea, many times not then neither upon a generous account, but as we are some ways obliged by interest and self-love, and a dear regard to our selves, when we have suffered the like our selves, and have learned to pity others by our

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own sufferings, or when in danger or probability to be in the like condition our selves; so many motives and obligations are necessary to awaken and stir up this affection in us. But GOD is merciful and pitiful to us out of the mere goodness of his nature; for few of these motives and considerations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderness is stirred up in GOD by the mere presence of the object, without any other inducement. The mercy of GOD, many times, doth not stay till we be actually miserable; but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great distance, and prevents our misery. GOD doth not only pity us in great calamities; but considers those lesser evils that are upon us. GOD is merciful to us, when we have deserved all the evils that are upon us; and far greater, when we are "less than the least of all his mercies," when we deserved all the misery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to our selves. Though GOD, in respect of his nature, be at an infinite distance from us; yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot possibly have any self-interest in it. The divine nature is not liable to want, or injury, or suffering; he is secure of his own happiness and fulness, and can neither wish the inlargement, nor fear the impairment of his estate; he can never stand in need of pity or relief from us, or any other, and yet he pities us.

Now if we consider the vast difference of this affection in GOD and us, how tender his mercies are, and how sensible his bowels; and yet we who have so many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as if we were born of the rock, and were the off-spring of

the nether millstone; sure, when we duly consider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of GOD.

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorse can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm? partly because we are secure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themselves upon us; and partly because they are so despicable in our eyes, and so far below us, that they do not fall under the consideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of him who is above thee: thou didst not make the creatures below thee, as GOD did; there's but a finite distance between thee and the meanest creatures; but there's an infinite distance between thee and GOD. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare our selves with other creatures; but compared to GOD, "we are worms, and not "men;" yea, we are nothing, yea, "less than no-"thing, and vanity." How great then is the mercy of GOD, which regards us, who are so far below him, which takes into consideration such inconsiderable nothings as we are! We may say with David, Psal. viii. 4. "LORD, what is man, that thou art "mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou "visitest him?" and with Job, chap. vii. 17. "What is "man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that "thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?"

And then how hard do we find it to forgive those who have injured us? If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled? How mindful of an injury? How do anger and revenge boil within us? How do we upbraid men with their faults? What vile and low submission do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offence and

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provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the disciples of our SAVIOUR, after he had so emphatically taught them forgiveness, in the petition of the LORD's prayer, yet they had very narrow spirits as to this; Matth. xviii. 21. Peter comes to him, and asks him, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven "times?" He thought that was much: And yet we have great obligations to pardoning and forgiving others, because we are obnoxious to GOD and one another: we shall many times stand in need of pardon from GOD and men; and it may be our own case; and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to our selves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of others; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and mistakes, and all occasions, and temptations, and provocations considered; and when we have done amiss, upon submission, and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: but GOD, who is not at all liable to us, how ready he is to forgive! If we confess our sins to him, he is merciful to forgive: he pardons freely; and such are the condescensions of his mercy, though he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beseeches us to be reconciled: if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, Luke xv. 20. What reason have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of GOD to us?

Use 2. The great mercy of GOD to us, should stir up in us shame and sorrow for sin. The judgments of GOD may break us; but the consideration of GOD's mercy should rather melt and dissolve us into tears: Luke vii. 47. the woman that washed CHRIST's feet with her tears, and wiped them with her

her hair, the account that our SAVIOUR gives of the great affection that she expressed to him, was, "she "loved much, because much was forgiven her;" and she grieved much, because much was forgiven her. SERM. CXLVII.

Especially we should sorrow for those sins which have been committed by us after GOD's mercies received. Mercies after sins should touch our hearts, and make us relent: it should grieve us that we should offend and provoke a GOD so gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and so ready to forgive: but sin against mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greatest aggravations of sin. And as mercy raises the guilt of our sins, so it should raise our sorrow for them. No consideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindness; and the greater mercy has been shewed to us, the greater our sins, and the greater cause of sorrow for them; contraries do illustrate, and set off one another; in the great goodness and mercy of GOD to us, we see the great evil of our sins against him.

Every sin has the nature of rebellion and disobedience; but sins against mercy have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of GOD, we rebel against our sovereign; but as we sin against the mercies of GOD, we injure our benefactor. This makes our sin to be horrid, and astonishing, Isa. i. 2. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for "the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and "brought up children, and they have rebelled against "me." All the mercies of GOD are aggravations of our sins; 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8, 9. "And Nathan "said to David, thou art the man. Thus saith the "LORD GOD of Israel, I anointed thee king over Is-

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" rael, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul,
" and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's
" wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of
" Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too lit-
" tle, I would moreover have given unto thee such
" and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised
" the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his
" sight?" GOD reckons up all his mercies, and from them aggravates David's sin; 1 Kings xi. 9. he takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his mercy: and it is the worst temper in the world not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercy: no greater evidence of a wicked heart, than that the mercies of GOD have no effects upon it; Isai. xxvi. 10. " Let favour be shewed to the wick-
" ed, yet will he not learn righteousness."

Use 3. Let us imitate the merciful nature of GOD. This branch of GOD's goodness is very proper for our imitation. The general exhortation of our SAVIOUR, Matt. v. 48. " Be ye therefore perfect, e-
" ven as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" is more particularly expressed by St. Luke, chap. vi. 36. " Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also
" is merciful." Men affect to make images, and impossible representations of GOD; but, as Seneca saith, *Crede deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.* We may draw this image and likeness of GOD; we may be gracious and merciful as he is. CHRIST, who was " the express image of his Father," his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy; " he went about doing good" to the souls of men, by preaching the gospel to them; and to the bodies of men, in healing all manner of diseases: there is nothing that he recommends more to us, in his gospel, than this spi-

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rit and temper; Mat. v. 7. "Bleſſed are the merciful, "for they ſhall obtain mercy." How many parables doth he uſe, to ſet forth the mercy of GOD to us, with a deſign to draw us to the imitation of it? The parable of the prodigal; of the good Samaritan; of the ſervant to whom he forgave ten thouſand talents. We ſhould imitate GOD in this, in being tender and compaſſionate to thoſe that are in miſery. SERM. CXLVII.

This is a piece of natural, indiſpenſable religion, to which poſitive and inſtituted religion muſt give way. Amos vi. 6. "I deſired mercy, and not ſacri-"fice;" which is twice cited and uſed by our SAVIOUR. Micah vi. 9. "He hath ſhewed thee, O "man, what it is that the LORD thy GOD requires "of thee; to do juſtice, and love mercy, and to "walk humbly with thy GOD."

This is always one part of the deſcription of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miſeries and neceſſities of others; Pſal. xxxvii. 26. "He is ever "merciful, and lendeth." He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures; Prov. xii. 10. "A righteous man regardeth the "life of his beaſt." There is nothing more contrary to the nature of GOD, than a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to be affected with the miſeries and ſufferings of others: how unlike is this to "the Father of "mercies, and the GOD of conſolation!" When we can ſee cruelty exerciſed, and our bowels not be ſtirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to GOD, who is "very pitiful, and of "tender mercies!" But to rejoice at the miſeries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how GOD threatens Edom for rejoicing at the miſeries of his brother Jacob; Obadiah ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. But to delight to make others miſerable,

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and to aggravate their ſufferings, this is deviliſh; this is the temper of hell, and the very ſpirit of the deſtroyer.

It becomes man, above all other creatures, to be merciful, who hath had ſuch ample and happy experience of GOD's mercy to him, and doth ſtill continually ſtand in need of mercy from GOD. GOD hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of GOD to us, we had all of us long ſince been miſerable. Now as we have received mercy from GOD, we ſhould ſhew it to others. The apoſtle uſeth this as an argument why we ſhould relieve thoſe that are in miſery and want, becauſe we have had ſuch experience of the mercy and love of GOD to us; 1 John iii. 16, 17. "Hereby perceive we the love of "GOD, becauſe he laid down his life for us. But "whoſo hath this world's good and ſeeth his bro- "ther have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of "GOD in him?" That man hath no ſenſe of the mercy of GOD abiding upon his heart, that is not merciful to his brother. And it is an argument why we ſhould forgive one another; Eph. iv. 32. "Be ye kind one "to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, "even as GOD for CHRIST's ſake hath forgiven "you." Chap. v. 1. "Be ye therefore followers of "GOD, as dear children." Col. iii. 12, 13. "Put "on therefore (as the elect of GOD, holy and belov- "ed) bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of "mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing one "another, and forgiving one another, if any man "have a quarrel againſt any: even as CHRIST for- "gave you, ſo alſo do ye."

And we continually ſtand in need of mercy both from GOD and man. We are liable one to another, and in the change of human affairs, we may be all ſub-

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ſubject to one another by turns, and ſtand in need of one another's pity and compaſſion; and we muſt expect, that "with what meaſure we mete to others, "with the ſame it ſhall be meaſured to us again." To reſtrain the cruelties, and check the inſolencies of men, GOD hath ſo ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, mens cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane.

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all ſtand in need of mercy from GOD. If we be merciful to others in ſuffering, and forgive them that have injured us, GOD will be ſo to us, he will pardon our ſins to us: Prov. xvi. 6. "By mercy and "truth iniquity is purged." 2 Sam. xxii. 26. "With the merciful thou wilt ſhew thy ſelf merci-"ful." Prov. xiv. 21. "He that hath mercy on the "poor, happy is he." Prov. xxi. 21. "He that fol-"loweth after righteouſneſs and mercy, findeth life." Matth. vi. 14. "If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, "your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you." But on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to thoſe that have offended us, and inexorable to thoſe who deſire to be received to favour, and cruel to thoſe who lye at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in neceſſity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of GOD will leave us, that he will "forget to be gracious, and ſhut up in "anger his tender mercy." Matt. vi. 15. "If ye "forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will "your Father forgive your treſpaſſes." That is a dreadful paſſage, St. James ii. 13. "He ſhall "have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed "no mercy." How angry is the LORD with the ſervant who was ſo inexorable to his fellow-ſervant, after

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after he had forgiven him so great a debt, as you find in the parable, Mat. xviii. 24. He owed him ten thousand talents, and, upon his submission and intreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him all: but no sooner had this favour been done to him by his LORD, but, going forth, he meets his fellow-servant, who owed him a small, inconsiderable debt, an hundred pence; he lays hands on him, and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: he falls down at his feet, and useth the same form of supplication that he had used to his LORD; but he rejects his request, and puts him in prison. Now what saith the LORD to him? ver. 32, 33, 34. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that "debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not "thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-ser-"vant, even as I had pity on thee? And his LORD "was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, "till he should pay all that was due unto him." Now what application doth our SAVIOUR make of this? ver. 35. "So likewise shall my heavenly Fa-"ther do also unto you, if ye from your hearts for-"give not every one his brother their trespasses."

GOD's readiness to forgive us should be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greatest injuries that we can suffer from men, if we compare them to the sins that we commit against GOD, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as an hundred pence to ten thousand talents. If we would be like GOD, we should forgive the greatest injuries; he pardoneth our sins, though they be exceeding great; many injuries; though offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied: for so GOD doth to us;

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" He pardoneth iniquity, tranſgreſſion and ſin," Ex. xxxiv. 7. Iſa. lv. 7. " He will have mercy, he " will abundantly pardon." We would not have GOD only to forgive us ſeven times, but ſeventy times ſeven, as often as we offend him; ſo ſhould we forgive our brother.

And we ſhould not be backward to this work; GOD is " ready to forgive us," Neh. ix. 17. And we ſhould do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we ſay we forgive, carry on a ſecret deſign in our hearts of revenging our ſelves when we have opportunity: but we ſhould from our hearts forgive every one; for ſo GOD doth to us, who when he forgives us, " caſts " our iniquities behind his back, and throws them " into the bottom of the ſea, and blots out our tranſ- " greſſion, ſo as to remember our iniquity no more."

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to GOD, " forgive us our treſpaſſes, as we " forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us," we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation againſt our ſelves; we pronounce the ſentence of our own condemnation, and importune GOD not to forgive us.

Uſe. 4. If the mercy of GOD be ſo great, this may comfort us againſt deſpair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they conſider their unworthineſs, the nature and number of their ſins, and the many heavy aggravations of them; they are apt to ſay, with Cain, that " their ſin is greater than can be for- " given." But do not look only upon thy ſins, but upon the mercies of GOD. Thou canſt not be too ſenſible of the evil of ſin, and of the deſert of it; but whilſt we aggravate our ſins, we muſt not leſſen

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the mercies of GOD. When we consider the multitude of our sins, we must consider also the multitude of GOD's tender mercies: we have been great sinners, and GOD is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thy self in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy sins, and forsaking of them, and thou hast no reason to doubt but the mercy of GOD will receive thee; "If we confess our sins, he is "merciful and faithful to forgive them." If we had offended man, as we have done GOD, we might despair of pardon; but it is GOD, and not man, that we have to deal with: and "his ways are not "as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: "but as the heavens are high above the earth, so "are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts "above our thoughts."

We cannot be more injurious to GOD, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and, when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeased and reconciled to us. We disparage the goodness and truth of GOD, when we distrust those gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodness; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compassionate sinners, and really desire their happiness. Doth not he condescend so low as to represent himself afflicted for the miseries of men, and to rejoice in the conversion of a sinner? and shall not we believe that he is in good earnest? Doth CHRIST weep over impenitent sinners, because "they will not know the things of their peace?" and canst thou think he will not pardon thee, upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themselves, and will not be saved? and canst thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot ho-

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nour and glorify GOD more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are ſaid to glorify GOD by our repentance, becauſe thereby we acknowledge GOD's holineſs and juſtice; ſo we glorify him by believing his mercy, becauſe we conceive a right opinion of his goodneſs and truth; we ſet to our ſeal, that GOD is merciful and true; Pſal. cxlvii. 11. it is ſaid, that "GOD takes pleaſure in them "that hope in his mercy." As he delights in mercy, ſo in our acknowledgments of it; that ſinners ſhould conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou doſt ſubmit to the terms of GOD's mercy, thou haſt no reaſon to deſpair of it: and he that thinks that his ſins are more, or greater than the mercy of GOD can pardon, muſt think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodneſs in GOD. SERM. CXLVII.

Uſe 5. By way of caution againſt the preſumptuous ſinner. If there be any that treſpaſs upon the goodneſs of GOD, and preſume to encourage themſelves in ſin, upon the hopes of his mercy; let ſuch know, that GOD is juſt, as well as merciful. A god of all mercy is an idol, ſuch a god as men ſet up in their own imaginations; but not the true GOD, whom the ſcriptures deſcribe. To ſuch perſons the ſcripture deſcribes him after another manner; Nah. i. 2. "GOD is jealous; the LORD revengeth, and is "furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his ad-"verſaries, and reſerveth wrath for his enemies. If any man abuſe the mercy of GOD, to "the ſtrengthening of himſelf in his own wickedneſs, and bleſs "himſelf in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, "though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, "and add drunkenneſs to thirſt: the LORD will "not ſpare him, but then the anger of the LORD

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" and his jealouſy ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and " all the curſes that are written in this book ſhall " lye upon him, and the LORD will blot out his " name from under heaven," Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Though it be the nature of GOD to be merciful, yet the exerciſe of his mercy is regulated by his wiſdom; he will not be merciful to thoſe that deſpiſe his mercy, to thoſe that abuſe it, to thoſe that are reſolved to go on in their ſins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to ſay, " Let us ſin, that grace may a- " bound." GOD deſigns his mercy for thoſe that are prepared to receive it; Iſa. lv. 7. " Let the wick- " ed forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his " thoughts, and turn unto the LORD, and he will " have mercy, and to our GOD, for he will abun- " dantly pardon." The mercy of GOD is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and it is no where offered to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. GOD hath no where ſaid that he will be merciful to thoſe who, upon the ſcore of his mercy, are bold with him, and preſume to offend him; but " the mercy of the LORD is upon them " that fear him, and keep his covenant, and re- " member his commandments to do them. There " is forgiveneſs with him, that he may be feared;" but not that he may be deſpiſed and affronted. This is to contradict the very end of GOD's mercy, which is, to lead us to repentance, to engage us to leave our ſins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abuſing the mercy of GOD: we cannot provoke the juſtice of GOD more, than by preſuming upon his mercy. This is the time of GOD's mercy; uſe this opportunity: if thou neglecteſt it, a day of juſtice and vengeance is coming;

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Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Despisest thou the riches of his "goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, "not knowing that the goodness of GOD leads to "repentance? And treasurest up unto thy self wrath "against the day of wrath, and the revelation of "the righteous judgment of GOD?" Now is the manifestation of GOD's mercy; but there is a time a coming, when the righteous judgment of GOD will be revealed against those who abuse his mercy, "not "knowing that the goodness of GOD leadeth to re-"pentance." To think that the goodness of GOD was intended for any other end than to take us off from sin, is a gross and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any conclusion from the mercy of GOD, which may harden them in their sins, they are such as the prophet speaks of, Is. xxvii. 11. "A people of no understanding; therefore he that "made them will not have mercy on them; and he "that formed them will shew them no favour." Mercy itself will rejoice in the ruin of those that abuse it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There is no person towards whom GOD will be more severely just, than towards such. The justice of GOD, exasperated and set on by his injured and abused mercy, like a razor set in oil, will have the keener edge, and be the sharper for it's smoothness. Those that have made the mercy of GOD their enemy, must expect the worst his justice can do unto them.

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The patience of GOD.

2 PET. iii. 9.

The LORD *is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

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IN the beginning of this chapter the apoſtle puts the Chriſtians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and of the apoſtles of our LORD and SAVIOUR, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and, perhaps, by the apoſtles themſelves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would preſently follow the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; but he tells them, that before that, there would ariſe a certain ſect, or ſort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, deſigning, probably, the Carpocratians (a branch of that large ſect of the Gnoſticks) of whom St. Auſtin expreſly ſays, that they denied the reſurrection, and, conſequently, a future judgment. Theſe St. Peter calls ſcoffers, ver. iii. 4. "Knowing "this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days "ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, "where is the promiſe of his coming?" The word is ἐπαγγελία, which ſignifies a declaration in general, whether it be by way of promiſe or threatening. What is become of that declaration of CHRIST ſo frequently repeated in the goſpel, concerning his com-

ing to judgment? "For since the fathers fell asleep," SERM. CXLVIII.
or, "saying that the fathers are fallen asleep," except only that men die, and one generation succeeds another, "all things continue as they were from the "creation of the world;" that is, the world continues still as it was from the beginning, and there is no sign of any such change and alteration as is foretold. To this he answers two things:

1. That these scoffers, though they took themselves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of God. They talked very ignorantly concerning the world, when they said, "All things continued as they were "from the creation of it," when so remarkable a change had already happened, as the destruction of it by water; and therefore the prediction concerning the destruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they shewed themselves likewise very ignorant of the perfection of the divine nature; to which, being eternally the same, a thousand years, and one day, are all one: and if God make good his word some thousands of years hence, it will make no sensible difference concerning his eternal duration; it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; ver. 8. "Be not ignorant of "this one thing, that one day is with the Lord "as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one "day." This, it seems, was a common saying among the Jews, to signify, that to the eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore, with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thousand years, or one day. The Psalmist hath an expression much to the same purpose, Psal. xc. 4. "For a thousand years in thy sight are "but

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" but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch " in the night." And the son of Sirach likewise, Ecclus. xviii. 10. " As a drop of water to the sea, " and as a grain of sand to the sea-shore, so are a " thousand years to the days of eternity." The like expression we meet with in heathen writers; " to the " god's no time is long," saith Pythagoras: And Plutarch, " the whole space of a man's life, to the " gods, is as nothing." And in his excellent discourse of the slowness of the divine vengeance, (the very argument St. Peter is here upon) he hath this passage, " that a thousand, or ten thousand years, are but as " an indivisible point to an infinite duration." And therefore, when the judgment is to be eternal, the delay of it, though it were for a thousand years, is an objection of no force, against either the certainty, or the terror of it; for, to eternity, all time is equally short; and it matters not when the punishment of sinners begins, if it shall never have an end.

2. But because the distance between the declaration of a future judgment, and the coming of it, though it be nothing to GOD, yet it seemed long to them: therefore he gives such an account of it, as doth not in the least impeach the truth and faithfulness of GOD, but is a clear argument and demonstration of his goodness. Admitting what they said to be true, that GOD delays judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will never be; but it shews the great goodness of GOD to sinners, that he gives them so long a space of repentance, that so they may prevent the terror of that day, whenever it comes, and escape that dreadful ruin, which will certainly overtake, sooner or later, all impenitent sinners: " The LORD is not slack " concerning his promise;" that is, as to the de-

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claration which he hath made of a future judgment, "as some men account slackness;" That is, as if the delay of judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a false inference from the delay of punishment, and an ill interpretation of the goodness of GOD to sinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpose to give men time to repent, and, by repentance, to prevent their own eternal ruin; "GOD is not slack concern-"ing his promise, as some men count slackness; but "is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any "should perish, but that all should come to repen-"tance." In the handling of these words, I shall do these three things:

First, I shall consider the patience and long-suffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-suffering to "us-ward."

Secondly, I shall shew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity, as the scoffers, here foretold by the apostle, argued, that because our LORD delayeth his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come; "GOD is not slack con-"cerning his promise, as some men count slackness."

Thirdly, I will consider the true reason of GOD's patience and long-suffering towards mankind, which the apostle here gives; "he is long-suffering to us-"ward, not willing that any should perish, but that "all should come to repentance."

First, I will consider the patience and long-suffering of GOD towards mankind, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-"suffering to us-ward." In the handling of this, I shall do these three things.

I. I shall

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I. I shall shew what is meant by the patience and long-suffering of GOD.

II. That this is a perfection of the divine nature.

III. I shall give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of GOD to mankind.

I. What is meant by the patience and long-suffering of GOD.

The Hebrew word signifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the new testament it is sometimes expressed by the word ὑπομονὴ, which signifies GOD's forbearance, and patient waiting for our repentance; sometimes by the word ἀνοχὴ, which signifies GOD's holding in his wrath, and restraining himself from punishing; and sometimes by μακροθυμία, which signifies the extent of his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearing for a long time the punishment due to sinners.

So that the patience of GOD is his goodness to sinners, in deferring or moderating the punishment due to them for their sins; the deferring of deserved punishment in whole, or in part, which, if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his long-suffering; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the punishment due to sin, is an instance likewise of GOD's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal punishment, but the adjourning of the eternal misery of sinners, is a principal instance of GOD's patience; so that the patience of GOD takes in all that space of repentance which GOD affords to sinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befal sinners in this life, and are short of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of GOD. Whenever GOD punisheth, "it is of his great mer-

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" cy and patience that we are not consumed, and " becauſe his compaſſions fail not. I proceed to the IId Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that patience is a perfection of the divine nature. SERM. CXLVIII.

It is not neceſſarily due to us, but it is due to the perfection of the divine nature, and eſſentially belongs to it. It is a principal branch of GOD's goodneſs, which is the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of all other; and therefore we always find it in ſcripture, in the company of GOD's milder and ſweeter attributes. When GOD would give the moſt perfect deſcription of himſelf, and, as he ſays, to Moſes, " make all his glory to paſs before us," he uſually does it by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs; and patience is always one of them, Exod. xxxiv. 6. " The LORD paſſed by before Moſes, and " proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD GOD, merci- " ful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in " goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. " But " thou, O LORD, art a GOD full of compaſſion, and " gracious, long-ſuffering, and plenteous in mercy " and truth." Pſal. ciii. 8. " The LORD is merciful " and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mer- " cy." And the ſame you find Pſal. cxlv. 8. Jonah iv. 2. Joel iii. 13.

Sometimes, indeed, you find a ſeverer attribute added to theſe, as that " he will by no means clear " the guilty," Ex. xxxiv. 7. But it is always put in the laſt place; to declare to us, that GOD's goodneſs, and mercy, and patience are his firſt and primary perfections: and it is only when theſe fail, and have no effect upon us, but are abuſed by us, to the encouragement of our ſelves in an impenitent courſe, that his juſtice takes place.

Nay, even among men, it is eſteemed a perfecti-

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on to be able to forbear and to restrain our anger; passion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wisdom; Prov. xiv. 29. "He that is slow to "wrath, is of great understanding; but he that is "hasty of spirit exalteth folly;" Prov. xvi. 32. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the migh- "ty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that "taketh a city." Rom. xii. 21. "Be not over- "come of evil, but overcome evil with good." To be impatient is to be overcome, but to forbear anger and revenge is victory. Patience is an argument of great power and command of our selves; and therefore GOD himself, who is the most powerful being, is slow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of GOD, than his patience; that when he is provoked by such vile and despicable creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from destroying us. This is the argument which Moses useth, Numb. xiv. 17, 18. that the power of GOD doth so eminently appear in his patience; "And now, I beseech thee, let the "power of my LORD be great, according as thou "hast spoken, saying, the LORD is gracious, and "long-suffering." And yet power, where it is not restrained by wisdom and goodness, is a great temptation to anger; because where there is power, there is something to back it, and make it good. And therefore the psalmist doth recommend and set off the patience of GOD, from the consideration of his power; Psal. vii. 11. "GOD is strong, and patient; "GOD is provoked every day;" GOD is strong, and therefore patient; or, he is infinitely patient, notwithstanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.

Among men, anger and weakness commonly go toge-

together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the son of Sirach, Ecclus. x. 18. "Pride "was not made for man, nor furious anger for "him that is born of a woman." So that anger and impatience is every where unreasonable: where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for omnipotency; and where there wants power, anger is above it: it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needless, and of no use; and where there is no power, it is vain, and to no purpose. So that patience is every where a perfection, both in GOD and man. I proceed to the

IIId Thing I proposed, which was, to give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of GOD to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we consider these two things:

1. How men deal with GOD.

2. How notwithstanding this, GOD deals with them.

1. How men deal with GOD. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expression is in the prophet, Isa. xliii. 24. "thou hast made me to serve with thy "sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." Every sin that we commit is an affront to the divine majesty, and a contempt of his authority: by denying submission to his laws we question his omnipresence, and say, "doth GOD see? and is there know-"ledge in the most High?" Or if we acknowledge his omnipresence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is still the greater; because then we affront him to his face; we dare his justice, and challenge his omnipotency, and provoke the LORD to jealousy, as if we were stronger than he.

Is not GOD patient, when "the whole world lies

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" in wickedneſs," and " the earth is overſpread " with violence," and " is full of the habitations of " cruelty?" when he who is " of purer eyes than " to behold iniquity," and is ſo highly offended at the ſins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon " them that deal treacherouſly, and to hold his " peace?" when the " wicked perſecutes and de- " vours the man that is more righteous than he?" when even that part of the world, which profeſſeth the name of GOD and CHRIST, do, by their vile and abominable lives, " blaſpheme that holy and glorious " name whereby they are called?"

Every moment GOD hath greater injuries done to him, and more affronts put upon him, than were ever offered to all the ſons of men: and, ſurely, provocations are trials of patience, eſpecially when they are ſo numerous, and ſo heinous; for if offences riſe according to the dignity of the perſon injured, and the meanneſs of him that doth the injury, then no offences are ſo great as thoſe that are committed by men againſt GOD, no affronts like to thoſe which are offered to the divine majeſty by the continual provocations of his creatures. And is not this an argument of GOD's patience, that the glorious majeſty of heaven ſhould bear ſuch multiplied indignities from ſuch vile worms? that he who is the former of all things, ſhould endure his own creatures to rebel againſt him, and the work of his hands to ſtrike at him? that he who is our great benefactor ſhould put up ſuch affronts from thoſe who depend upon his bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he, in whoſe hands our breath is, ſhould ſuffer men to breathe out oaths, and curſes, and blaſphemies againſt him? Surely theſe prove the patience of GOD to purpoſe, and are equally trials and arguments of it.

2. The

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2. The patience of God will farther appear, if we consider how, notwithstanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and "turn the "wicked together into hell, with all the nations that "forget God." He is patient to the greatest part of mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his justice, "that others may hear and "fear, and take warning by them." He is patient to particular persons, in that, notwithstanding our daily provocations, he prevents us daily with the blessing of his goodness, prolonging our lives, and vouchsafing so many favours to us, that, by this great goodness, we may be led to repentance.

But the patience of God will more illustriously appear, if we consider these following particulars, which are so many evidences and instances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to spare and forbear us at all. It is patience, that he doth not surprize us in the very act of sin, and let fly at us with a thunder-bolt so soon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate person, as it did upon the Israelites, "whilst "the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;" that a man is not struck dead or mad whilst he is telling a lie; that the soul of the profane and false swearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

2. That God spares us, when it is in his power so easily to ruin us; when he can with one word command us out of being, and, by cutting asunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If God were disposed to severity, he could deal with us after another manner; and as the expression is in the prophet, "ease himself of his adversaries, and be avenged of "his enemies."

3. That

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3. That GOD exerciseth this patience to sinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in arms against him, and committing hostilities upon him; he bears with us, even when we are challenging his justice to punish us, and provoking his power to destroy us.

4. That he is so very slow and unwilling to punish, and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal punishments, GOD defers them a long while, and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for those temporal judgments which GOD inflicts upon sinners, he carries himself so, that we may plainly see all the signs of unwillingness that can be; he tries to prevent them; he is loth to set about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is easily persuaded and prevailed withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorously, and to extremity; and he is soon taken off, after he is engaged in it. All which are great instances and evidences of his wonderful patience to sinners.

(1.) GOD's unwillingness to punish appears, in that he labours to prevent punishment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent sin, the meritorious cause of GOD's judgments. To this end, he hath threatened it with severe punishments, that the dread of them may make us afraid to offend; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us a space of repentance, and invites us earnestly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments; he expostulates with sinners, and reasons the case with them, as if he were more concerned not to punish, than they are not to be punished: and thus, by his earnest desire of our repentance, he shews how little he desires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work. Judg-

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Judgment is, in ſcripture, called "his ſtrange work;" as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the ſudden. He is repreſented as not prepared for ſuch a work, Deut. xxxii. 41. "If I whet my glittering ſword:" as if the inſtruments of puniſhment were not ready for us. Nay by a ſtrange kind of condeſcenſion to our capacities, and to ſet forth to us the patience of GOD, and his ſlowneſs to wrath, after the manner of men, he is repreſented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to deſtroy us; Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3. where he tells Moſes, that "he would ſend an "angel before them; for I will not go up in the "midſt of thee, leſt I conſume thee in the way."

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When Daniel prayed for the deliverance of the people of Iſrael out of captivity, the angel tells him, that, "at the beginning of his ſupplication, the com-"mandment came forth," to bring him a promiſe of their deliverance. The mercy of GOD, many times, prevents our prayers, and outruns our wiſhes and deſires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he paſſeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that, by our repentance, we will prevent his judgments; "he hark-"ened and heard, (ſaith GOD in the prophet Jeremiah) "but they ſpake not right: no man repented "him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, what have I done?" He is repreſented as waiting and liſtening, to hear if any penitent word would drop from them; he gives the ſinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to conſider what he hath done, and ſpace to reaſon himſelf into repentance. For this reaſon the judgments of GOD do often follow the ſins of men at a great diſtance, otherwiſe he could eaſily

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make them mend their pace, and "consume us in a "moment."

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance: Hosea xi. 8. "How shall "I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver "thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me, and "my repentings are kindled together." He is represented as making many essays and offers before he came to it: Psal. cvi. 26. "Many a time lifted "he up his hand in the wilderness to destroy them." He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be so severe. GOD withholds his judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the expression is Jer. vi. 11. till he can forbear no longer; Jer. xliv. 22. "So that "the LORD could no longer bear, because of the "evil of your doings, and because of the abomina-"tions which ye have committed."

(4.) GOD is easily prevailed upon not to punish. When he seemed resolved upon it, to destroy the murmuring Israelites, yet how often, at the intercession of Moses, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to spare a very wicked people, appears by the instance of Sodom, where, if there had been but ten righteous persons, he would not have destroyed them for the ten's sake. Yea, when his truth seemed to have been pawned, (at least in the apprehension of his prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the case of Nineveh. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! with what joy does he tell the prophet the news of Ahab's humiliation! "Seest thou how Ahab hum-"bleth himself? Because he humbleth himself, I will "not bring the evil in his days."

(5.) When he punisheth, he does it very seldom, rigor-

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rigorously, and to extremity, not so much as we deserve; Psal. ciii. 10. "He hath not dealt with "us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to "our iniquities," nor so much as he can. He doth not let loose the fierceness of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath. Psal. lxxviii. 38. "being full "of compassion, he forgave their iniquity, and de- "stroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he "his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

(6.) After he hath begun to punish, and is ingaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous instance of this, 2 Sam. xxiv. when GOD had sent three days pestilence upon Israel, for David's sin in numbering the people, and, at the end of the third day, the angel of the LORD had stretched forth his hand over Jerusalem, to destroy it; upon the prayer of David, it is said, that "the LORD repent- "ed of the evil, and said to the angel that destroy- "ed, It is enough; stay now thine hand." Nay, so ready is GOD to be taken off from this work, that he sets a high value upon those who stand in the gap to turn away his wrath; Numb. xxv. 11, 12, 13. "Phi- "nehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, "hath turned my wrath away from the children of "Israel (while he was zealous for my sake among "them) that I consumed not the children of Israel "in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give un- "to him my covenant of peace. And he shall have "it, and his seed after him even the covenant of an "everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for "his GOD, and made an atonement for the children "of Israel." That which GOD values in this action of Phinehas, next to his zeal for him, is, that "he "turned away his wrath, and made an atonement "for the children of Israel."

5. And lastly, The patience of GOD will yet appear with farther advantage, if we consider some eminent and remarkable instances of it; which are so much the more considerable, because they are instances not only of GOD's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many persons. The long-suffering of GOD waited in the days of Noah upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the space of an hundred and twenty years. GOD bore with the people of Israel in the wilderness, after they had tempted him ten times, for the space of forty years; Acts xiii. 18. "And about the time of for-"ty years suffered he their manners in the wilder-"ness." And this instance of GOD's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want flesh or water, they were out of patience with GOD: when Moses was in the mount with GOD but forty days, they presently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of forty days, and yet GOD bore their manners forty years. GOD had spared Nineveh for some ages; and when his patience was even expired, and he seems to have past a final sentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for forty days, that they might sue out their pardon in that time; and they did so; "they turned from their evil ways, "and GOD turned from the evil he said he would do "them, and he did it not."

But the most remarkable instance of GOD's long-suffering is to the Jews, if we consider it with all the circumstances of it; after they had rejected the Son of GOD, notwithstanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjustly condemned, and cruelly "murdered the LORD of "life," yet the patience of GOD respited the ruin of that people forty years. Besides

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Beſides all theſe, there are many inſtances of GOD's patience to particular perſons: but it were endleſs to enumerate theſe; every one of us may be an inſtance to our ſelves of GOD's long-ſuffering.

I ſhall only add, as a farther advantage to ſet off the patience of GOD to ſinners, that his forbearance is ſo great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own ſervants. Job, who was ſo patient a man himſelf, thought much at it; Job xxi. 7, 8. "Where-"fore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty "in power? Their ſeed is eſtabliſhed in their ſight "with them, and their offſpring before their eyes." Jonah challengeth GOD for it, chap. iv. 2. "Was "not this my ſaying, when I was yet in my coun-"try? and therefore I fled before unto Tarſhiſh; "for I know that thou art a gracious GOD, and mer-"ciful, ſlow to anger, &c." Jonah had obſerved GOD to be ſo prone to this, that he was loth to be ſent upon his meſſage, leſt GOD ſhould diſcredit his prophet, in not being ſo good (ſhall I ſay) ſo ſevere as his word.

I have done with the firſt thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, viz. The great patience and long-ſuffering of GOD to mankind.

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The patience of God.

2 PET. iii. 9.

The LORD *is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

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I Have made entrance into theſe words; in the handling of which, I propoſed to do theſe three things.

Firſt, to conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-ſuffering to us-ward."

Secondly, to ſhew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of his judgment, is no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity; "GOD is not "ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count "ſlackneſs."

Thirdly, to conſider the true reaſon of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering towards mankind; "He "is long-ſuffering to us-ward; not willing that any "ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repen-"tance." I have already ſpoken to the

Firſt of theſe, namely, the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of judgment, is

no

no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity; "GOD is not slack concerning his promise, as "some men count slackness;" that is, as the scoffers, here mentioned by the apostle, did ignorantly and maliciously reason, that because our LORD delayed his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come. SERM. CXLIX.

There was, indeed, some pretence for this objection, because the Christians did generally apprehend that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem; and it seems, the disciples themselves were of that persuasion before our SAVIOUR's death; when our SAVIOUR discoursing to them of the destruction of the temple, they put these two questions to him, Matt. xxiv. 3. "And as he sat upon the mount of "Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, say-"ing, Tell us when shall these things be? and what "shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of "the world? When shall these things be?" that is, the things he had been speaking of immediately before, viz. the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dissolution of the temple; that is plainly the meaning of the first question; to which they subjoined another, "And what shall be the sign of thy coming?" that is, to judgment, "and of the end of the world?" which, in all probability, was added to the former, because they supposed that the one was presently to follow the other, and therefore the same answer would serve them both: and it appears by our SAVIOUR's answer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this mistake, which might be of good use to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the gospel, since there was like to be so little time for it;

and

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and likewiſe to wean their affections from this world, which they thought to be ſo near an end.

One thing, indeed, our SAVIOUR ſays, which (had they not been prepoſſeſſed with another opinion) does ſufficiently intimate, that there might be a conſiderable ſpace of time betwixt the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the day of judgment; and this we find only in St. Luke, chap. xxi. 24. where, ſpeaking of the miſeries and calamities that ſhould come upon the Jews, he ſays, "They ſhall fall by the edge of "the ſword, and be carried into captivity into all "nations; and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of "the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be ful-"filled." So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the end of the world, the accompliſhment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things; Jeruſalem being at this day ſtill trodden down by the Gentiles, and the Jews ſtill continuing diſperſed over the world: but the diſciples, it ſeems, did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age; in which they were much confirmed by what our SAVIOUR, after his reſurrection, ſaid of St. John, upon occaſion of Peter's queſtion concerning him; John xxi. 21, 22. "LORD, what ſhall this man do? "JESUS ſaith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I "come, what is that to thee?" Upon which words of our SAVIOUR concerning him, St. John himſelf adds, ver. 23. "Then went this ſaying abroad a-"mong the brethren, that that diſciple ſhould not "die;" that is, that he ſhould live till the coming of our LORD, and then be taken up with him into heaven; from all which they probably (as they thought)

thought) concluded, that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilst St. John was alive: but St. John, who writ last of all the evangelists (as Eusebius tells us) and lived till after the destruction of Jerusalem, as he acquaints us with this mistake, which was current among the Christians, so he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that "JESUS "said not, he should not die; but if I will that he "tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" He tells us, that our SAVIOUR did not affirm that he should not die; but, to repress St. Peter's curiosity, he says, "If it were my pleasure that he should not die at "all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that "to thee?" And St. Peter likewise (or whoever was the author of this second epistle, or at least of this third chapter, which seems to be a new epistle by itself) takes notice of this mistake, about the nearness of the day of judgment, as that which gave occasion to these scoffers to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the Christians, because they had been already deceived about the time of it; and this the scoffers twitted them with in that question, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Therefore the learned Grotius conjectures very probably, that this last epistle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the time fixed for CHRIST's coming to judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this scoff till after that time. St. Peter, indeed, did not live so long; and therefore Grotius thinks that this epistle was writ by Simeon, or Simon, who was successor of St. James in the bishoprick of Jerusalem, and lived to the time of Trajan.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might understand where the ground and force

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force of this scoff lay; namely in this, that because the Christians had generally been very confident, that the coming of CHRIST to judgment would be presently after the destruction of Jerusalem, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment; because they might be deceived in that, as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falsly, because our SAVIOUR had positively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the time of it: nay, so far was he from that, that he had plainly told his disciples that the precise time of the day of judgment GOD had reserved as a secret to himself, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son himself; Mark xiii. 32, 33. "But of that day "and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels "which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Fa- "ther. Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know "not when the time is." So that if they presumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our LORD: it was great presumption in them to determine the time of it, when our SAVIOUR had so expressly told them that the Father had reserved this as a secret, which he had never communicated to any, ; and therefore if they were mistaken about it, it was no wonder. But their mistake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our SAVIOUR's clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at some thousands of years distance, and yet be certain for all that; and the delay of it was no sign of the uncertainty of our SAVIOUR's predic-

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tion concerning it, but only of GOD's great patience and long-suffering to sinners, in expectation of their repentance; "GOD is not slack concerning his pro-"mise, as some men count slackness, but is long-"suffering to us-ward." And this brings me to the

Third and last particular in the text, namely, the true reason of GOD's patience and long-suffering to mankind; "he is long-suffering to us-ward, not "willing that any should perish, but that all should "come to repentance." And for this St. Peter cites St. Paul, ver. 15th of this chapter; "And account "that the long-suffering of the LORD is salvation;" that is, that the great end and design of GOD's goodness and long-suffering to sinners, is, that they may repent, and be saved: "Account that the long-suffering of our LORD is salvation, "even as "our beloved brother Paul also, according to the "wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you." Now the words are not expressly found in St. Paul's writings: but the sense and effect of them is, viz. in Rom. ii. 4. "Despisest thou the riches of his "goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, "not knowing that the goodness of GOD leadeth "thee to repentance?" GOD hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience to sinners: he is good, that he may make us so, and that "his good-"ness may lead us to repentance." He defers punish-ment on purpose, that he may give men time to bethink themselves, and to return to a better mind: "he winks at the sins of men, that they may re-"pent," says the son of Sirach. The patience of GOD aims at the cure and recovery of those who are not desperately and resolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of GOD's patience to sinners; and if he fail of this end, through

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our hardneſs and impenitency, he hath other ends, which he will infallibly attain: he will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindicate the righteouſneſs of his juſtice: the damned in hell ſhall acknowledge, that the patience of GOD was great mercy and goodneſs to them, though they abuſed it; for GOD does not loſe the glory of his patience, though we loſe the benefit of it, and he will make it ſubſervient to his juſtice one way or other. Thoſe great offenders whom he ſpares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he, many times, makes uſe of, as inſtruments for the puniſhing of others, as "rods of "his wrath, for the diſcipline of the world;" and he often reſerves thoſe who are incorrigibly bad for a more remarkable ruin. But, however, they are reſerved to the judgment of the great day;" and if, after GOD hath exerciſed much patience towards ſinners in this world, he inflicts puniſhment on them in the next, it muſt be acknowledged to be moſt juſt; for what can he do leſs, than to condemn thoſe who would not be ſaved, and to make them miſerable who ſo obſtinately refuſed to be happy?

Before I come to apply this diſcourſe concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD to ſinners, I muſt remove an objection or two:

I. The ſeverity of GOD to ſome ſinners in this life, and to all impenitent ſinners in the next, ſeems to contradict what hath been ſaid concerning GOD's patience and long-ſuffering.

As for the ſeverity of GOD towards impenitent ſinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of GOD; becauſe the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, does ſuppoſe a determinate time, and that they will not laſt always: this life is the day of GOD's patience, and

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and in the next world his juſtice and ſeverity will take place: and therefore the puniſhment of ſinners in another world, after GOD hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodneſs, and very agreeable to his wiſdom and juſtice; for it is no part of goodneſs, to ſee itſelf perpetually abuſed; it is not patience, but ſtupidity and inſenſibleneſs, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and juſt laws for ever deſpiſed and contemned.

And as for his ſeverity to ſome ſinners in this life; as to Lot's wife, to the Iſraelite that gathered ſticks on the ſabbath-day, to Nadab and Abihu, to Uzzah, to Ananias and Sapphira, and to Herod Agrippa; in all which inſtances GOD ſeems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment ſpeedily: to theſe I anſwer, That this ſeverity of GOD to ſome few, doth rather magnify his patience to the reſt of mankind; he may be ſevere to ſome few, for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better uſe of his patience, and not to treſpaſs ſo boldly upon it; and, perhaps, he hath exerciſed much patience already towards thoſe to whom at laſt he is ſo ſevere; as is plain in the caſe of Herod, and it may well be ſuppoſed in moſt of the other inſtances; or elſe the ſin ſo ſuddenly and ſeverely puniſhed, was very heinous and preſumptuous, of a contagious and ſpreading nature, and of dangerous example. Lot's wife ſinned moſt preſumptuouſly againſt an expreſs and an eaſy command, and whilſt GOD was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of Nadab and Abihu, and of the man that gathered ſticks on the ſabbath-day, were preſently after the giving of the law, in which caſe great ſeverity is neceſſary; and that of Ananias and

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Sapphira, at the firſt publiſhing of the goſpel, that the majeſty of the divine Spirit, and the authority of the firſt publiſhers of it, might not be contemned: That of Uzzah was upon the return of the ark of God from among the Philiſtines, that the people might not loſe their reverence for it, after it had been taken captive. So that theſe neceſſary ſeverities to a few, in compariſon of thoſe many that are warned by them, are rather arguments of God's patience, than objections againſt it.

II. It is objected, That if God do not deſire the ruin of ſinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to paſs that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath reſiſted his will? To this I anſwer,

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this. He can, if he pleaſeth, conquer and reclaim the moſt obſtinate ſpirits; he is able out of "ſtones "to raiſe up children unto Abraham." And ſometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the converſion of St. Paul, in a kind of violent and irreſiſtible manner: but he hath no where declared that he will do this to all; and we ſee plainly, in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be ſaid, "not to be will-"ing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould "come to repentance," when he does, on his part, what is ſufficient to that end; and upon this ground the ſcripture every where repreſents God as deſiring the repentance of ſinners, and their obedience to his laws: Deut. v. 29, "O that there were ſuch an "heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep "all my commandments always, that it might be "well with them!" So Jer. xiii. 27. "O Jeruſalem, "wilt thou not be made clean? when ſhall it once "be?" If. v. 3, 4. we find God there ſolemnly appeal-

appealing to the people of Iſrael, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done; "And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, "and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me "and my vineyard: what could have been done "more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? "wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth "grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" GOD may juſtly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from thoſe to whom he affords a ſufficiency of means to that end. And if ſo, then,

3. The true reaſon why men do not repent, but periſh, is becauſe they are obſtinate, and will not repent: and this account the ſcripture every where gives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin conſequent upon it. Pſal. lxxxi. 13. "O that my peo-"ple had hearkened unto me, and Iſrael had walk-"ed in my ways! But my people would not hark-"en to my voice, and Iſrael would none of me." Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "Why will ye die, O houſe of Iſra-"el?" Prov. i. 29, 30, 31. "That they hated know-"ledge, and did not chuſe the fear of the LORD. "They would none of my counſel; they de-"ſpiſed all my reproof. Therefore they ſhall eat of "the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with "their own devices." The ruin of ſinners doth not proceed from the counſel of GOD, but from their own choice. And ſo likewiſe our SAVIOUR every where chargeth the ruin and deſtruction of the Jews upon their own wilful obſtinacy.

The inferences from this diſcourſe, concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD towards mankind, ſhall be theſe three.

I. To ſtir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of GOD towards us, notwithſtand-

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ing our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to our ſelves thoſe words, Lam. iii. 22. "It is of the LORD's mercy that we "are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not." They are "renewed every morning." Whenever we ſin (and "we provoke GOD every day") it is of his "patience that we are not deſtroyed:" and when we ſin again, this is a new and greater inſtance of GOD's patience. The mercies of GOD's patience are no more to be numbered than our ſins: we may ſay with David, "How great is the ſum of them?" The goodneſs of GOD in ſparing us, is, in ſome reſpect, greater than his goodneſs in creating us; becauſe he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to deſtroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of GOD for a pattern to our ſelves. Plutarch ſays, "That GOD "ſets forth himſelf in the midſt of the world for our "imitation, and propounds to us the example of "his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries "haſtily upon one another.

III. Let us comply with the deſign of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering towards us, which is "to "bring us to repentance." Men are very apt to abuſe it to a quite contrary purpoſe, to the encouraging themſelves in their evil ways. So Solomon obſerves, Eccl. viii. 11. "Becauſe ſentence againſt "an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore "the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to "do evil:" But this is very falſe reaſoning; for the patience of GOD is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and the deſign of it is not to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner: Rom. ii. 4. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and for"bearance, and long-ſuffering? not knowing that "the

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" the goodneſs of GOD leadeth thee to repentance ?" Patience in GOD ſhould produce repentance in us; and we ſhould look upon it as an opportunity given us by GOD to repent and be ſaved; 2 Pet. iii. 15. " Account that the long-ſuffering of GOD is ſalva-" tion." They that do not improve the patience of GOD to their own ſalvation, miſtake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are ſo far from making this uſe of it, that they preſume upon it, and ſin with more courage and confidence becauſe of it: but that we may be ſenſible of the danger of this, I will offer theſe two or three conſiderations;

1. That nothing is more provoking to GOD, than the abuſe of his patience. GOD's patience waits for our repentance; and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their ſuperiors, hath ſomething in it that is grievous: how much more grievous and provoking muſt it be to the great GOD, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodneſs and long-ſuffering, to have that deſpiſed? after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thruſt away with contempt, but to have that which ſhould be an argument to us to leave our ſins, abuſed into an encouragement to continue in them? GOD takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance; Luke xiii. 7. " Behold, theſe three " years I come ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find " none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

2. Conſider that the patience of GOD will have an end. Though GOD ſuffers long, he will not ſuffer always; we may provoke GOD ſo long, till he can forbear no longer without injury and diſhonour to his wiſdom, and juſtice, and holineſs; and GOD will not ſuffer one atttribute to wrong the reſt: his wiſdom will determine the length of his patience; and when

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when his patience is to no purpose, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wisdom will then put a period to it; then the patience of his mercy will determine. "How often would I have gathered "you, and you would not? therefore your house is "left unto you desolate." And the patience of GOD's judgments will then determine; "Why "should they be smitten any more? they will revolt "more and more." Yea, patience itself, after a long and fruitless expectation, will expire. A sinner may continue so long impenitent, till the patience of GOD, as I may say, grows impenitent, and then our ruin will make haste, and destruction "will "come upon us in a moment." If men will not come to repentance, "the day of the LORD will "come as a thief in the night," as it follows in the next verse after the text; the judgment of GOD will suddenly surprize those who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Consider that nothing will more hasten and aggravate our ruin, than the abuse of GOD's patience. All this time of GOD's patience, his wrath is coming towards us; and the more we presume upon it, the sooner it will overtake us; Luke xii. 46. The wicked servant, who said his LORD delayed his coming, and fell to rioting and drunkenness, our SAVIOUR tells us, "that the lord of that servant will come "in a day when he looks not for him."

And it will aggravate our ruin; the longer punishment is a coming, the heavier it will be: those things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution; the weight of GOD's wrath will make amends for the slowness of it; and the delay of judgment will be fully recompensed in the dreadfulness of it when it comes.

Let

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Let all those consider this who go on in their sin, and are deaf to the voice of GOD's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon those who trifle away this day of GOD's patience; nothing will sooner and more inflame the wrath and displeasure of GOD against us, than his abused patience, and the despised riches of his goodness. As oil, though it be soft and smooth, yet, when it is once inflamed, burns most fiercely; so the patience of GOD, when it is abused, turns into fury; and his mildest attributes into the greatest severities.

And if the patience of GOD do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin: after GOD hath kept a long indignation in his breast, it will, at length, break forth with the greater violence. The patience of GOD encreaseth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion; Levit. xxvi. 18. "And if you will still (says GOD to the people of Israel) "walk contrary to me, and if "ye will not be reformed by all these things, I will "punish you yet seven times more." And ver. 28. "I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, "according to your sins." At first GOD's justice accuseth sinners; but, after a long time of patience, his mercy comes in against us, and, instead of staying his hand, adds weight to his blows; Rom. ix. 22. "What if GOD, willing to shew his wrath, and "to make his power known, endured with much "long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for de-"struction?" They upon whom the patience of GOD hath no good effect, are "vessels of wrath, pre-"pared and fitted for destruction." If ever GOD display his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the most severe manner upon those who

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have despised and abused his patience; for these, in a more peculiar manner, "do treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the "revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD."

To conclude: let us all take a review of our lives, and consider how long the patience of GOD hath waited upon us, and borne with us; with some, twenty, forty, perhaps sixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how GOD spared us in such a danger, when we gave ourselves for lost? And how he recovered us in such a sickness, when the physician gave us up for gone? And what use have we made of this patience and long-suffering of GOD towards us? It is the worst temper in the world, not to be melted by kindness, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his case is desperate, and past remedy. "Consider this, "all ye that forget GOD," lest his patience turn into fury; for "GOD is not slack, as some men count "slackness; but long-suffering to sinners, not wil-"ling that any should perish, but that all should "come to repentance."

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SERMON CL.

The long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

NOTHING is more evident, than that the world lies in wickedness, and that iniquity every where abounds; and yet nothing is more certain, than that God will not acquit the guilty, and let sin go unpunished. All men, excepting those who have offered notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and have put the candle of the Lord, which is in them, under a bushel, do believe that there is a God in the world, to whose holy nature and will sin is perfectly contrary, "who loves righteous-"ness and hates iniquity," that "his eyes are upon "the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings;" that "there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, "where the workers of iniquity may hide them-"selves." All men, except those whose consciencies are seared, as it were, with an hot iron, are convinced of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one whether men serve God or serve him not, do well, or live wickedly. Every man, from his inward sense and experience, is satisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no necessity of sinning, but that whenever we do amiss, it is our own act, and we chuse to do so; and so far is

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he from giving the least countenance to sin, that he hath given all imaginable discouragement to it, by the most severe and terrible threatenings, such as one would think sufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awful and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable instances of his justice and severity upon notorious offenders, even in this life; and yet, for all this, men do, and will sin; nay, they are zealously set and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives sinners such heart, and makes them so resolute and undaunted in so dangerous a course. Solomon gives us this account of it; because the punishments and judgments of God follow the sins of men so slowly, and are long before they overtake the sinner. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men "are fully set in them to do evil."

The scope of the wise man's discourse is this; that by reason of God's forbearance and long-suffering towards sinners in this life, it is not so easy to discern the difference between them and other men; this life is the day of God's patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now because God doth defer and moderate the punishment of sinners in this world, and reserve the weight of his judgments to the next; because, through the long-suffering of God, many great sinners live and die without any remarkable testimony of God's wrath and displeasure against them, "therefore the "hearts of the children of men are fully set in them "to do evil."

If we render the text word for word from the original,

ginal, it runs thus; "Becauſe nothing is done as a "recompence to an evil work, therefore the hearts "of the ſons of men are full in them to do evil;" that is, becauſe men are not oppoſed, and contradicted in their evil ways, becauſe divine juſtice doth not preſently check and control ſinners, becauſe ſentence is not immediately paſt upon them, and judgment executed, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is full in them to do evil; that is, therefore men grow bold and preſumptuous in ſin; for the Hebrew word which we render, "is fully ſet in "them," we find Eſth. vii. 5. where Ahaſuerus ſays concerning Haman, "Who is he? and where "is he that durſt preſume in his heart to do ſo? "whoſe heart was full to do ſo," *Fervet in iis cor filiorum hominum*; ſo ſome render it, "the hearts "of men boil with wickedneſs," are ſo full of it, that it works over. Men are reſolute in an evil courſe, "their hearts are ſtrengthened and hardened "in them to do evil," ſo others tranſlate the words. The tranſlation of the LXX is very emphatical, ἐπληροφορήθη καρδία, "the heart of the ſons of men "is fully perſuaded and aſſured to do evil." All theſe tranſlations agree in the main ſcope and ſenſe, viz. That ſinners are very apt to preſume upon the long-ſuffering of GOD, and to abuſe it, to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I ſhall

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Firſt, briefly ſhew that it is ſo.

Secondly, whence this comes to paſs, and upon what pretences and colours of reaſon, men encourage themſelves in ſin, from the patience of GOD.

Thirdly, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer an objection about this matter.

Firſt, that men are very apt to abuſe the long-

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suffering of GOD, to the encouraging and hardening of themselves in an evil course, the experience of the world, in all ages, does give abundant testimony. Thus it was with the old world, "when the long-suf-"fering of GOD waited in the days of Noah, while he "was preparing an ark, for the space of an hundred and "twenty years," 1 Pet. iii. 20. For the wickedness of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threatened; but GOD was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while: hereupon they grew secure in their impenitency, and went on in their course, as if they had no apprehension of danger, no fear of the judgment threatened. So our SAVIOUR tells us, Matth. xxiv. 38, 39. "As in the days that were be-"fore the flood, they were eating and drinking, "marrying and giving in marriage, until the day "that Noah entred into the ark, and knew not un-"til the flood came, and took them all away." And so it was with Sodom, Luke xvii. 28. And "likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they eat, "they drank, they bought, they sold, they plant-"ed, they built." And so, our SAVIOUR tells us, it will be in the end of the world; "Even thus "shall it be in the day when the son of man is re-"vealed." So likewise the apostle St. Paul, Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, "and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing "that the goodness of GOD leadeth thee to repen-"tance? But after thy hardness and impenitent "heart, treasurest up to thy self wrath against the "day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous "judgment of GOD." The goodness and long-suffering of GOD, which ought in all reason to lead men to repentance, is to many an occasion of greater hardness and impenitency. So also St. Peter fore-

tels, 2 Pet. iii. 3. "that in the last days there should "come scoffers, who should walk after their own "hearts lusts, saying, where is the promise of his "coming?" And we see, in daily experience, that the greatest part of sinners grow more obstinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's patience, and because he delays the punishment due to them for their sins. Let us consider, in the SERM. CL.

Second place, whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretence and colour of reason men encourage themselves in sin, from the long-suffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness, and from an evil heart of unbelief, from the temptation and suggestion of the devil, one of whose great arts it is, to make men question the threatenings of God, and to insinuate, as he did to our first parents, either that he hath not denounced such threatenings, or that he will not execute them so severely. All these causes do concur to the producing this monstrous effect; but that which I design to inquire into, is from what pretence of reason, grounded upon the long-suffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. For when the wise man saith, that "because sentence against an "evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the "heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do "evil," he does not intend to insinuate, that God's long-suffering fills the hearts of men with wicked designs and resolutions, and does, by a proper and direct efficacy, harden sinners in their course; but that wicked men, upon some account or other, do take occasion, from the long-suffering of God, to harden themselves in sin; they draw false conclusions from it

to

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to impose upon themselves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they see something in the forbearance of GOD, and his delay of punishment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil course, notwithstanding the threatenings of GOD.

And therefore I shall endeavour to shew, what those false conclusions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them: and I shall rank them under two heads; those which are more gross and atheistical, and those which are not so gross, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment, (which we, who believe a GOD, call the patience or long-suffering of GOD) are these three; either that there is no GOD; or if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I shall speak more briefly of these, because I hope there are but few in the world of such irregular and besotted understandings, as to make such inferences as these from the delay of punishment.

1st. From hence some would fain conclude, that there is no GOD. That some are so absurd as to reason in this manner, the scripture tells us, Psal. xiv. 1. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no GOD: "they are corrupt, and have done abominable "works." Now the argument that these men frame to themselves, is this; GOD doth not take a speedy course with sinners, and revenge himself immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no GOD; for if there were, he would shew himself,

and

and not bear the affronts of sinners, when it is so easy for him to vindicate himself by a swift and speedy vengeance. Thus the poet represents the atheist arguing; *Nullos esse deos, inane cœlum, affirmat Selius, probatque, quod se factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* "Selius affirms, there are no gods, and "that heaven is an empty place, and proves it, "because, whilst he denies God, he sees himself in a "very happy and prosperous condition." SERM. CL.

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictious rate these men reason. First, they would have no God, lest he should be just, and punish them as they deserved; and then, in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but justice and severity, lest there should be a God; as if no other notion could be framed of the divine nature, but of a rash fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent passion, which when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain itself, and forbear punishment for a moment. Justice is not such a perfection as doth necessarily exclude wisdom, and goodness, and patience; it doth in no wise contradict the perfection of the divine nature to bear with sinners, in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if God foresees their final impenitency, to respite their punishment to the most fit and convenient season. God may suffer long, and yet be resolved, if sinners persist in the abuse of his goodness and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitiful ground of atheism, that because God is so much better than wicked men deserve, they will not allow him to be at all.

2dly, Others infer from the delay of punishment, that there is no providence that administers the affairs of the world, and regards the good and bad actions

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of men. For though the being of GOD be acknowledged, yet if he do not regard what is done here below, nor concern himself in human affairs, sinners are as safe and free to do what they please, as if there were no GOD; and upon this ground, the scripture tells us, many encourage themselves in their wickedness; Psal. lxiv. 5. "They encourage themselves "in an evil matter, they commune of laying snares "privily; they say, Who shall see them?" And more expressly, Psal. xciv. 4, 5, 6, 7. "How long "shall they utter and speak hard things, and all "the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They "break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and af-"flict thine heritage. They slay the widow and "the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet "they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall "the GOD of Jacob regard it." And if this were so, well might they encourage themselves. If it were true which Epicurus saith, "That GOD takes "no knowledge of the actions of men, that he is "far removed from us; and contented with him-"self, and not at all concerned in what we do;" if this were true, the inference which Lucretius makes, were very just; *Quare religio pedibus subjecta vicissim obteritur*; "Men might trample religion under their "feet, and live without any regard to the laws of it.

But let us see how they infer this from the long-suffering of GOD, that he neglects the affairs of the world, and hath no consideration of the actions of men, because they see the ungodly to prosper in the world, equally with others that are strictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times, to be in a more prosperous and flourishing condition; "they are not in "trouble like other men, neither are they plagued "like other men." So that if there be a GOD, it seems

(say

(ſay they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and "looks on upon them that deal treacherouſly, "and holds his peace, whilſt the wicked devoureth "the man that is more righteous than himſelf:" as the prophet expreſſeth it, Hab. i. 13. SERM. CL.

For anſwer to this, I ſhall only give this reaſonable and credible account of the long-ſuffering of GOD, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the ſcripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind; namely, that this life is a ſtate of probation and trial, wherein GOD "ſuffers men to walk in their own ways" without any viſible check and reſtraint, and does not uſually inflict preſent and remarkable puniſhments upon them for their evil deeds; becauſe this being a ſtate of trial of the diſpoſitions and manners of men, is rather the proper ſeaſon of patience, than of puniſhments and rewards; and therefore it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that GOD reſerves ſinners for a ſolemn and publick trial at the great aſſizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his juſtice upon the deſpiſers of his patience and long-ſuffering, when he will make "his judgment to break forth as the light, "and his righteouſneſs as the noon-day." In the mean time the providence of GOD, when he ſees it fit, gives ſome remarkable inſtances of his juſtice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earneſt of a future judgment; and theſe ſometimes more general, as in the deſtruction of the old world by an univerſal deluge, when "he ſaw "the wickedneſs of men to be great upon the earth." And ſuch was that terrible vengeance which was poured down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the

cities about them; which, as St. Jude tells us, "are "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of e- "ternal fire," that is, of a perpetual destruction by fire.

3dly, Another gross and atheistical inference, which men are apt to make from the delay of punishment, is, that there is no such difference of good and evil as is pretended; because they do not see the good and bad actions of men differenced in their rewards, because divine justice doth not presently manifest itself; and "every transgression and disobedience" doth not immediately "receive a just recompence "of reward," therefore they cannot believe, that the difference between good and evil is so great and evident.

For answer to this: Not to insist upon the difference which the providence of GOD sometimes makes between them in this life, I appeal to the consciences of men, whether they do not secretly and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between good and evil. Are not the worst of men apt to conceive better hopes of success, when they are about a just and honest undertaking, than when they are ingaged in a wicked design? Do not bad men feel a secret shame and horror, when no eye sees them, and the wickedness they are about to commit doth not fall under the cognizance and censure of any human court or tribunal? Have they not many checks and rebukes in their own spirits, much disturbance and confusion of mind, when they are enterprising a wicked thing? And does not this plainly argue, that they are guilty to themselves that they are about something which they ought not to do?

It is very true, that most men are more sensible of the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects and consequences of it, and suffer the punishment

that is due to it: but yet the sense of good and evil is so deeply impress upon human nature, that I think no man, remaining a man, can quite deface and blot out the difference of good and evil. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and suggestions of their own minds, they cannot possibly infer, from the delay of punishment, that there is no difference of good and evil. SERM. CL.

But because those who argue thus are but few, in comparison, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindness, and height of impiety, as to disbelieve a GOD, and a providence; and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of conscience, as to have lost all sense of good and evil; therefore I shall rather insist,

II. Upon those kind of reasonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting perdition; and they are such as these:

1. Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore sin is not so great an evil.

2. Therefore GOD is not so highly offended and provoked by it. Or,

3. GOD is not so severe in his own nature, as he is commonly represented.

4. Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain. Or, however,

5. It is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance, in our old age, or at the hour of death; by some such false reasonings as these, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-suffering of GOD, they harden and encourage themselves in an evil course.

1. Because the punishment of sin is deferred, therefore they conclude it is not so great an evil; they

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they do not feel the ill effects of it at present; all things go well and prosperously with them, no less than with those who are so strict and conscientious; and therefore they hope there is no such great evil in sin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to themselves. For answer to this,

(1.) Consider seriously what sin is, and then thou wilt see reason enough to call it a great evil. To sin against GOD, is to contemn the greatest authority in the world, to contradict the greatest holiness and purity, to abuse the greatest goodness, and to provoke almighty justice to take vengeance upon thee, and to make thee as miserable as thou art capable of being. To sin against GOD, is to be disobedient to thy sovereign, and unthankful to thy best benefactor, and to act contrary to the greatest obligations, against thy best reason and truest interest; to disoblige thy kindest friend, and to gratify thy worst and bitterest enemy; it is to disorder thyself, to create perpetual disquiet to thy own mind, and to do the greatest mischief possible to thyself; to deprive thyself of the greatest happiness, and to draw down upon thyself extreme and eternal misery. And what do we call a great evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds, and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumstances of ugliness and deformity in it that can be imagined?

(2.) Whatever sin be in itself, yet from hence we can in no wise conclude, that it is not a great evil, because the punishment of it is deferred for a while; from hence indeed it follows, that GOD is very good in deferring the punishment which is due to thee for thy sins, but by no means that sin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does indeed argue the goodness and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all abate

bate of the heinousness of the crime for which he is sentenced. The great evil of sin is evident, because the holy and just GOD hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and detestation of it, and threatened it with most severe and direful punishment; but that GOD respites the punishment which is due to sin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon sinners, but affords them a space, and means, and opportunity of repentance: this doth not at all lessen the evil of sin, but is rather an aggravation of it; that we should offend and provoke that GOD, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us, so very loth to bring those evils upon us, which we are so rash and forward to pull down upon ourselves. SERM. CL.

2. If GOD doth not immediately punish sin upon the commission of it, and instantly let fly at the sinner, this they would construe to be a sign that he is not so highly offended and provoked by it; if he were, he would manifest his displeasure against it, by the sudden and violent effusions of his wrath. For answer to this, I desire these two things may be considered:

(1.) That GOD himself, in his word, every where plainly declares to us his great displeasure against sin; Psal. v. 4, 5. "Thou art not a GOD that "hast pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell "with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy "sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. "Thou art not a GOD that hast pleasure in wickedness." The words are a μείωσις, and less is spoken than is meant and intended, viz. That GOD is so far from taking pleasure in the sins of men, that he is highly displeased at them, and bears an implacable hatred against them.

And do not the terrible threatenings of GOD against sin

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sin declare him to be highly offended at it? When he says, that "he will come in flaming fire, to render "vengeance to all them that know not the gospel of "his Son;" and that they "shall be punished with "everlasting destruction, from the presence of the "LORD, and from the glory of his power." Can we think that all the threatenings of GOD's word, and all those direful curses which are written in his book, shall return empty, without doing any execution? thou that now flatterest thyself in vain and groundless hopes, that none of these evils shall come upon thee, when thou comest to stand before the great Judge of the world, and to behold the killing frowns of his countenance, and to hear those bitter words of eternal displeasure from the mouth of GOD himself, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared "for the devil and his angels;" thou wilt then believe that GOD is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy sins. We shall find in that day, that the threatenings of GOD's word, which we now hear so securely, and without terror, had a full signification; or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the scripture says of the happiness and glory of the next life, is true also of the misery and punishments of the other world, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, "neither have entred into the heart of man, those "terrible things which GOD hath reserved for the "workers of iniquity."

But, above all, the direful sufferings of the Son of GOD, when sin was but imputed to him, are a demonstration of GOD's implacable hatred of sin; for that rather than sin should go unpunished, GOD was pleased to subject his own Son to the sufferings due to it: this plainly shews, that he hated sin as much as he loved his own Son. But,

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But, (2dly,) GOD may conceive a very great displeasure against sin, and be highly incensed and provoked by it, and yet suspend the effects of his displeasure, and defer the punishment of it for a great while: and to imagine otherwise, argues a gross mistake of the nature of GOD, arising from our not considering the attributes and perfections of GOD in conjunction and consistency with one another. When we consider one attribute of GOD singly, and separate it from the rest, and frame such wide and large apprehensions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a false notion of GOD; and the reason of this mistake is, because, among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency doth commonly shut out others; because in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot stand together; but it is quite otherwise in the divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and consist together; one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of GOD, we are to take great heed that we do not raise any one attribute or perfection of GOD upon the ruin of the rest.

So that it is a false imagination of GOD, when we so attribute justice or anger to him, as to exclude his patience and long-suffering: for GOD is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not presently put him out of patience, so that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himself upon sinners. In this sense GOD says of himself, Isa. xxvii. 4. "Fury "is not in me." There is nothing of a rash and ungoverned passion in the wise and just GOD. Every sin indeed kindles his anger, and provokes his displeasure against us, and by our repeated and conti-

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nued offences, we ſtill add fuel to his wrath; but it doth not of neceſſity inſtantly break forth like "a "conſuming fire, and a devouring flame." The holy and righteous nature of GOD makes him neceſſarily offended and diſpleaſed with the ſins of men; but as to the manifeſtation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wiſdom and goodneſs do regulate and determine the proper time and circumſtances of puniſhment.

3. From the patience of GOD, and the delay of puniſhment, men are apt to conclude, that GOD is not ſo ſevere in his nature as he is commonly repreſented. It is true, he hath declared his diſpleaſure againſt ſin, and threatened it with dreadful puniſhments; which he may do, in great wiſdom, to keep the world in awe and order: but great things are likewiſe ſpoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exerciſe of his mercy: ſo that notwithſtanding all the threatenings which are denounced againſt ſin, it is to be hoped, that when ſentence comes to be paſt, and judgment to be executed, GOD will "remember mercy in the midſt of "judgment," and that "mercy will triumph over "judgment;" and that as now his patience ſtays his hand, and turns away his wrath, ſo at the laſt, the milder attributes of his goodneſs and mercy will interpoſe and moderate the rigour and ſeverity of his juſtice; and of this his great patience and long-ſuffering towards ſinners for the preſent ſeems to be ſome kind of pledge and earneſt: he that is ſo ſlow to anger, and ſo loth to execute puniſhment, may probably be prevailed upon by his own pity and goodneſs to remit it at the laſt: and this is the more credible, becauſe it is granted on all hands, that no perſon is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to make

make good his promiſes; he that promiſeth paſſeth a right to another; but he that threateneth keeps the right and power of doing what he pleaſeth in his own hands. SERM. CL.

I ſhall ſpeak a little more fully to this, becauſe it is almoſt incredible how much men bear up themſelves upon vain and groundleſs hopes of the boundleſs mercy of GOD, and "bleſs themſelves in their "hearts, ſaying, They ſhall have peace, though "they walk in the imagination of their hearts, "to add drunkenneſs to thirſt;" that is, though they ſtill perſiſt in their vices, and add one degree of ſin to another.

Now, for anſwer to this,

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening does not neceſſarily infer the certainty of the event; and that the thing threatened ſhall infallibly come to paſs; no perſon is obliged to perform his threatenings, as he is his promiſes; the threatenings of GOD declare what ſin deſerves, and what the ſinner may juſtly expect if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatenings of GOD, and will effectually hinder the execution of them: Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. "At what inſtant "I ſpeak (ſays GOD) concerning a nation, and con-"cerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull "down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt "whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I "will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto "them. And at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak con-"cerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to "build and to plant it; if it do evil in my ſight, "and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the "good wherewith I ſaid I would benefit them."

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Now if when GOD hath promiſed to do good to a people, ſin will hinder the bleſſing promiſed, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatened.

But as to the caſe of final impenitency and unbelief, GOD, that he might ſtrengthen his threatenings, hath added a ſign of immutability to them, having confirmed them with an oath; "I have ſworn (ſaith "the LORD) that they ſhall not enter into my "reſt": which, though it was ſpoken to the unbelieving Jews, the apoſtle to the Hebrews applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the goſpel, of which the infidelity of the Iſraelites was a type and figure. Now though GOD may remit of his threatenings: yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; becauſe it ſignifies the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby puts an end to all doubts and controverſies concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wiſeſt and ſafeſt way, to believe the threatenings of GOD, in the ſtrictneſs and rigour of them, unleſs there be ſome tacit condition evidently implied in them; becauſe if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwiſe, the conſequence of our miſtake is fatal and dreadful. It is true indeed, that GOD by his threatenings did intend to keep ſinners in awe, and to deter them from ſin: but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of theſe threatenings, ſuch a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and deſign of them; for threatenings ſignify very little, but upon this ſuppoſition, that in all probability they will be executed: and if this be true, it is the greateſt madneſs and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As

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(3.) As for those large declarations which the scripture makes of the boundless mercy of GOD to sinners, we are to limit them, as the scripture hath done, to the time and season of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and salvation; and when this life is ended, the opportunities of grace and mercy are past, and the day of recompence and vengeance will begin. Now GOD tries us, and offers mercy to us; but if we obstinately refuse it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we must limit the mercy of GOD to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are, repentance for sins past, and sincere obedience for the future: but if men continue obstinate and impenitent, and encourage themselves in sin from the mercy and patience of GOD; this is not a case that admits of mercy, but, on the contrary, his justice will triumph in the ruin and destruction of those who, instead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do despise and abuse them: "He will laugh at their ca-"lamity, and mock when their fear comes; when "their fear comes as desolation, and their destruc-"tion as a whirl-wind; when distress and anguish "cometh upon them, then they may call upon him, "but he will not answer; they may seek him ear-"ly, but they shall not find him. If we despise "the riches of GOD's goodness, and long-suffering, "and forbearance," he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpose; "with the froward he "will shew himself froward," and will be in a more especial manner severe towards those who take encouragement from his mercy, to disbelieve and despise his threatenings. And this GOD hath as plainly told us, as words can express any thing, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. "And if it come to pass that when he "heareth

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" heareth the words of this curſe, he bleſs himſelf " in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though I " walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drun- " kenneſs to thirſt: the LORD will not ſpare him, " but then the anger of the LORD, and his jealouſy, " ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and all the curſes " that are written in this book, ſhall lye upon him, " and the LORD ſhall blot out his name from under " heaven." Whatever right and power GOD hath reſerved to himſelf about the execution of his threatenings, he hath plainly declared, that, of all others, thoſe who encourage themſelves in a ſinful courſe, from the hopes of GOD's mercy, notwithſtanding his threatenings, ſhall find no favour and mercy at his hand: whatever he may remit of his threatenings to others, he will certainly not ſpare thoſe who believe ſo largely concerning the mercy of GOD, not with a mind to ſubmit to the terms of it, but to preſume ſo much the more upon it.

(4.) GOD hath not been wanting to ſhew ſome remarkable inſtances of his ſeverity towards ſinners in this world. As he is pleaſed ſometimes to give good men ſome fore-taſtes of heaven, and earneſts of their future happineſs; ſo likewiſe by ſome preſent ſtroke, to let ſinners feel what they are to expect hereafter, ſome ſparks of hell do now and then fall upon the conſciences of ſinners. That fear which is ſometimes kindled in men's conſciences in this life, that horrible anguiſh, and thoſe unſpeakable terrors which ſome ſinners have had experience of in this world, may ſerve to forewarn us of " the wrath which is to " come," and to convince us of the reality of thoſe expreſſions of the torments of hell, by " the worm " that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched." That miraculous deluge, which ſwallowed up the old world,

world, that hell which was rained down from heaven, in those terrible showers of fire and brimstone, to consume Sodom and Gomorrah; the earth opening her mouth upon Corah and his seditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell: these and many other remarkable judgments of GOD, in several ages, upon particular persons, and upon cities and nations, may satisfy us, in some measure, of the severity of GOD against sin, and be, as it were, pledges to assure sinners of the insupportable misery and torments of the next life.

(5.) The argument is much stronger the other way, that because the punishment of sinners is delayed so long, therefore it will be much heavier and severer when it comes; that the wrath of GOD is growing all this while, and as we "fill up the "measures of our sins," he fills the "vials of "his wrath: Rom. ii. 5. and according to thy hard "and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath, "against the day of wrath, and the revelation of "the righteous judgment of GOD." GOD now keeps in his displeasure: but all the while we go on in an impenitent course, the wrath of GOD is continually increasing, and will at last be manifested by the righteous judgment of GOD upon sinners. GOD now exerciseth and displayeth his milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience: but these will not always hold out, there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the apostle speaks) GOD will "shew his wrath, and make his power known," after he hath "endured with much long-suffering "the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." All this long time of GOD's patience and forbearance "his wrath is kindled, and he is whetting his glit-"tering sword, and making sharp his arrows;" and

this long preparation doth portend a much more dreadful execution: so that we should reason thus from the long-suffering of GOD; GOD bears with us, and spares us at present, and keeps in his anger; therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not spare, but his anger will flame forth, and his jealousy smoke against us. This is but reasonable to expect, that they who in this world forsake their own mercies, the mercy of GOD in the next should forsake them.

4. Another false conclusion which men draw from the delay of punishment, is, that because it is delayed, therefore it is not so certain: the sinner escapes for the present, and though he have some misgivings and fearful apprehensions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

It is true, indeed, we are not so certain of the misery of wicked men in another world, as if it were present, and we lay groaning under the weight of it: such a certainty as this would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and strictly call faith; for "faith is the evidence of "things not seen." But sure we have other faculties besides sense to judge of things by; we may be sufficiently certain of many things which are neither present nor sensible, of many things past and future, upon good ground and testimony: we are sure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it; we are certain that we shall die though we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their causes, as well as in their present existence, if the causes be certain. The truth of GOD, who hath declared these things to us, is an abundant ground of assurance to us, though they be at a great distance: the certainty of things is not shaken by our wavering belief concerning them. But,

Beſides, the very light of nature, and the common reaſon of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-ſuffering of God, and the delay of preſent puniſhment. Though men are apt to think, that becauſe judgment is deferred, therefore it is not certain; yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reaſon otherwiſe; that becauſe God is ſo patient to ſinners in this life, therefore there will a time come when they ſhall be puniſhed; that becauſe this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there ſhall be another ſtate after this life, which ſhall be a ſeaſon of recompence. And by this argument chiefly it was that the wiſeſt of the heathen ſatisfied themſelves concerning another ſtate after this life, and anſwered the troubleſom objection againſt the providence of God, from the unequal adminiſtration of things in this world, ſo viſible in the afflictions and ſufferings of good men, and the proſperity of the wicked; viz. That there would be another ſtate that would adjuſt all theſe matters, and ſet them ſtreight, when good and bad men ſhould receive the full recompence of their deeds.

The 5th and laſt falſe concluſion, which men draw from the long-ſuffering of God and the delay of puniſhment is this; that it is, however, probably at ſome diſtance, and therefore they may ſin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, becauſe they ſee men much worſe than themſelves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or thee days warning, to perform this work of repentance very ſubſtantially, and to die with great comfort and aſſurance of their ſalvation. This is the moſt common deluſion of all the reſt, and

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hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more ſouls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have "ſlain their thouſands," but this "it's ten thouſands."

For anſwer to this, be pleaſed ſeriouſly to lay to heart theſe following conſiderations, moſt of which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to, becauſe I have, upon other occaſions, ſpoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a diſtance ſoever it may be. That which ſhall be a thouſand years hence, will certainly be; and it is but very ſmall comfort and encouragement, conſidering the vaſt diſproportion between time and eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty years ſhall be paſt and gone, then muſt I enter upon eternal miſery; then will thoſe intolerable torments begin which ſhall never have an end.

(2.) But it is not certain that it is at ſuch a diſtance: when we "put from us the evil day," it is many times nearer to us than we are aware, and when we think the judgment of GOD is at a great diſtance, "the judge" may be "near, even at the door." Our times are not in our own hands, but we are perfectly at the diſpoſal of another, who when he pleaſeth can put a period to them, and cauſe our breath to ceaſe from our noſtrils, and we ſhall not be; "There is no man hath power over the ſpirit, to "retain the ſpirit; neither hath he power in the day "of death," ſaith the wiſe man a little before the text. Thou dreameſt, perhaps, of many years continuance in this world, and, perhaps, in the height of this vain imagination, "the decree is ſealed, and the "commandment come forth" to ſummon thee out of this world, and thou art juſt dropping into that miſery, which thou fancieſt to be at ſuch a diſtance; whilſt thou art vainly promiſing thyſelf "the eaſe

"of,

" of many years," GOD may say to thee, " Thou SERM.
" fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," CL.
and then, where are all thy hopes?

(3.) Supposing the evil day were at a considerable distance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their salvation upon a future repentance; for what knowest thou, O man! but thou mayst be surprized by a sudden stroke, which may give thee no warning, leave thee no space of repentance? a violent disease may seize upon thee, which may disorder thy understanding, and so weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reasonable operations: at the best, how unfit are we for the most serious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unseasonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakness and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their first streightness; much more is it an improper time for this work, when sickness and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wise enough, do usually miscarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, till it be too late. Men had need then be of sound understanding and perfect memory, when they set about matters of so great consequence in respect to their temporal and eternal concernments: especially when men have the happiness of all eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their understandings about them, and all the advantages of leisure and consideration, to make a sober reflection upon their past lives, and make up their accounts with GOD, and to set all things right between him and them; and it is well, if, after all, a repentance wilfully deferred so long,

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so short and imperfect, so confused and huddled up, will at last be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miscarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppose thou wert sure to repent before thou leavest the world, and to do this work throughly, which no man can promise to himself that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reasonable encouragement to go on in an evil course, because we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treasure up much more sorrow and affliction to ourselves against the day of repentance, and consequently sin on, in hopes of being hereafter so much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man should go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more severe and exemplary punishment: sure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reasonable and considerate man.

Lastly, As to the encouragement which men take from the sudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with so much comfort and assurance; if this be well considered, there is little comfort to be fetched from such examples. For,

1st. Though a sincere repentance in such circumstances be possible; yet it is almost impossible for the party himself concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is sincere. GOD who knows the hearts of men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would in the future course of their lives have justified and made good their repentance and good resolutions, only knows the sincerity of it.

But, 2dly, no certain judgment is to be made from the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the business is not, what comfort and confidence men have, but what ground they have for

for it: and whereas men are apt piously to suppose, that so extraordinary a comfort and assurance is wrought in them by the spirit of GOD, nothing is more uncertain; because we sometimes see those who give no such testimony of their repentance, to die with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident persuasion of their salvation, as those that do. But this, certainly, is not from the spirit of GOD, a natural obstinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and false and mistaken principles may fill men for the present with as much comfort and confidence, as well grounded hopes. In the church of Rome, great numbers of those who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confession and absolution, and some good words of encouragement from the priest, die as full of peace and comfort, to all appearance, as the best of men.

Indeed it is very natural to men, who find themselves in a desperate condition, to be strangely elevated and raised, upon any hopes given of escaping so great a danger as they apprehend themselves to be in; especially if these hopes be given them by a grave man, of whose piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the sentence of death in themselves, as all wicked livers must have, they are naturally apt to be overjoyed at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To speak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which some have, upon a sudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes, because I cannot discern any sufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehension of their condition, next almost to despair of it, would much better become them; because their

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their case is really so very doubtful in itself. There is great reason for the repentance of such persons, and it becomes them well; but I see very little reason for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumstances and condition. Let them exercise as deep a repentance as is possible, and "bring "forth all the fruits meet for it" that are possible in so short a time; let them humble themselves before GOD, and pray incessantly to him day and night for mercy; make all the reparation they can for the injuries they have done, by confession and acknowledgment, and by making satisfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power, by giving alms to the poor, by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind and course of life; and for the rest humbly commit themselves to the mercy of GOD in JESUS CHRIST; let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the scripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greatest testimony that could be of a penitent sorrow for his sins, and of his faith in the SAVIOUR of the world, by a generous and couragious owning of him in the midst of his disgrace and suffering, when even his own disciples had denied and forsaken him: but we do not find in him any signs of extraordinary comfort, much less of confidence; but he humbly commended himself to the mercy and goodness of his SAVIOUR, saying, "Lord, remember me, when "thou comest into thy kingdom."

SER-

SERMON CLI.

The long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

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I HAVE considered how apt men are to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, and whence this comes to pass; where I considered the several false conclusions which sinners draw from the delay of punishment, as if there were no God, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or else, as is more commonly pretended, that sin is not so great an evil, and that God is not so highly offended at it, or that God is not so severe as he is represented; that the punishment of sin is not so certain, or however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented by a future repentance: all which I have spoken fully to, and endeavoured to shew the fallacy and unreasonableness of them. I shall now proceed to the

Third and last thing I propounded, which was, to answer an objection to which this discourse may seem liable; and that is this. If the long-suffering of God be the occasion of men's hardness and impenitency, then why is God so patient to sinners, when they are so prone to abuse his goodness and patience? and how is it goodness in God to forbear sinners so long, when this forbearance of his is so apt

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to minister to them an occasion of their farther mischief and greater ruin? It should seem according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greatest part of sinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but instantly upon the first occasion and provocation, to cut them off, and so to put a stop to their wickedness, and to hinder them from making themselves more miserable, by increasing their guilt, and "treasuring up wrath to themselves against the "day of wrath."

This is the objection, and because it seems to be of some weight, I shall endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to it in these following particulars, And,

I. I ask the sinner if he will stand to this? art thou serious, and wouldest thou in good earnest have GOD to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? Consider of it again. Dost thou think it desirable, that GOD should deal thus with thee, and let fly his judgments upon thee so soon as ever thou hast sinned? If not, why do men trifle, and make an objection against the long-suffering of GOD, which they would be very loth should be made good upon them?

II. It is likewise to be considered, that the long-suffering of GOD toward sinners is not a total forbearance: it is usually so mixt with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon ourselves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to "sin no more, "lest a worse thing come upon us;" lest that judgment, which we saw inflicted upon others, come home to us. And is not this great goodness, to warn us when he might destroy us, to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our case past remedy?

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All this time of GOD's patience, he threatens sinners, to awaken them out of their security, he punisheth them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity; he makes examples of some in a more severe and remarkable manner, that others may hear, and fear, and be afraid to commit the like sins, lest the like punishment overtakes them; he whips some offenders before our eyes, to shew us what sin deserves, and what we also may justly expect, if we do the same thing; and will nothing be a warning to us but our own sufferings!

Nay, GOD doth usually send some judgment or other upon every sinner in this life; he lets him feel the rod, that he may know that it is "an evil and "bitter thing to sin against him." He exerciseth men with many afflictions and crosses, and disappointments, which their own consciences tell them are the just recompences of their deeds; and by these lighter strokes, he gives us a merciful warning to avoid his heavier blows; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but being fed to the full, we grow wanton and foolish, he administers physick to us by affliction, and by adversity endeavours to bring us to consideration and a sober mind; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of GOD have done them that good, which his mercies and blessings could not; for GOD would save us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by sickness or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we desire, or by what we dread; so desirous is he of our repentance and happiness, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good; he strikes upon every passion in the heart of man; he works upon our love by his goodness, upon our hopes by his promises, and upon our

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fears, first by his threatnings, and if they be not effectual, then by his judgments; he tries every affection and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himself; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruin us, and render our case desperate and past hope?

And if any sinner be free from outward afflictions and sufferings, yet sin never fails to carry it's own punishment along with it; there is a secret sting and worm, a divine Nemesis and revenge, that is bred in the bowels of every sin, and makes it a heavy punishment to itself; the conscience of a sinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him wherever he goes; for whenever a man commits a known and wilful sin, he drinks down poison, which though it may work slowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.

So that the long-suffering of GOD is wisely ordered, and there is such a mixture of judgments in it, as is sufficient to awaken sinners, and much more apt to deter them from sin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of GOD, than to harden men by his long-suffering. This the scripture most expressly declares, 2 Pet. iii. 9. "He "is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any "should perish, but that all should come to repent-"ance." He hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience towards sinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us so, and that we may cease to do evil. The event of GOD's long-suffering may, by our own fault and abuse of it, prove our ruin; but the design and intention of it, is our repentance. "He winks at the sins of "men",

" men" (saith the son of Syrach) " that they may " repent." He passeth them by, and does not take speedy vengeance upon sinners for them, that they may have time to repent of them, and to make their peace with him, while they are yet in the way.

Nay, his long-suffering doth not only give space for repentance, but is a great argument and encouragement to it. That he is so loth to surprize sinners, that he gives them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, to consider what they have done, and to retract it by repentance, is a sufficient intimation that he hath no mind to ruin us, that " he desires not the death of " a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his " wickedness and live." And should not this goodness of his make us sorry that we have offended him? doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance? what other interpretation can we make of his patience, what other use in reason should we make of it, but to repent and return, that we may be saved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-suffering of GOD, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in any evil course; the proper and natural tendency of GOD's goodness is to lead men to repentance, and by repentance to bring them to happiness; Rom. ii. 4. " Despisest thou the riches of " his goodness and patience, and long-suffering, not " knowing that the goodness of GOD leadeth thee " to repentance?" This St. Peter, with relation to these very words of St. Paul, interprets, leading to salvation; 2 Pet. iii. 15. " And account that " the long-suffering of our LORD is salvation, as " our beloved brother Paul also hath written un- " to you." Now where did St. Paul write so, unless

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less in this text; "not knowing that the goodness "of GOD leads to repentance?" It is not only great ignorance, and a very gross mistake, to think that it is the design and intention of GOD's patience and long-suffering to encourage men in sin; but likewise to think, that in the nature of the thing, goodness can have any tendency to make men evil; "not knowing that the goodness of GOD leads to "repentance."

V. That through the long-suffering of GOD, sinners are hardened in their evil ways, is wholly to be ascribed to their abuse of GOD's goodness; it is neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it, through our own fault. And is this any real objection against the long-suffering of GOD? May not GOD be patient, though sinners be impenitent? May not he be good, though we be so foolish as to make an ill use of his goodness? Because men are apt to abuse the mercies and favours of GOD, is it therefore a fault in him to bestow them upon us? Is it not enough for us to abuse them, but will we challenge GOD also of unkindness in giving them? May not GOD use wise and fitting means for our recovery, because we are so foolish as not to make a wise use of them? And must he be charged with our ruin, because he seeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to ourselves, but will we be unthankful to GOD also? When GOD hath laid out the riches of his goodness and patience upon sinners, will they challenge him as accessory to their ruin? As if a foolish heir, that hath prodigally wasted the fair estate that was left him, should be so far from blaming himself as to charge his father with undoing him. Are these the best returns which the infinite mercy and

and patience of GOD hath deserved from us? Do we thus requite the LORD, foolish people and unwise!

GOD's patience would save sinners, but they ruin themselves by their abuse of it; let the blame then lye where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodness, though men refuse the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And lastly, but because this objection pincheth hardest in one point; viz. That GOD certainly foresees that a great many will abuse his long-suffering, to the encreasing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is his long-suffering any mercy and goodness to those, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be so much the more miserable, for having had so much patience extended to them? Therefore for a full answer, I desire these six things may be considered.

1. That GOD designs this life for the trial of our obedience, that according as we behave ourselves he may reward or punish us in another world.

2. That there could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice.

3. That GOD, by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future events, even those which are most contingent, such as are the arbritrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been denied, but without reason; since it is not only contrary to the common apprehensions of mankind from the very light of nature, that GOD should not fore-know future events, but to clear and express scripture; and that in such instances, for the sake of which they

deny

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deny God's foreknowledge in general of the future actions of free and voluntary agents, I mean, that the ſcripture expreſly declares God's determinate foreknowledge of the moſt wicked actions; as the crucifying of CHRIST, who is ſaid, according to the determinate counſel and fore-knowledge of GOD, to have been by wicked hands crucified and ſlain.

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the ſight and knowledge of things preſent hath upon them to make them to be preſent. I may ſee or know that the ſun is riſen, without ſeeing the cauſe of it's riſing; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cauſe that they are, when they are. And if any man aſk, how GOD can certainly fore-know things, which depend upon free and arbitrary cauſes, unleſs he do ſome way decree and determine them? I anſwer, that this is not a fair and reaſonable demand, to aſk of men, who have but finite underſtandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite knowledge hath of knowing and of fore-ſeeing the actions of free creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is of the two much more credible to reaſon, that infinite knowledge ſhould certainly fore-know things, which our underſtandings cannot imagine how they ſhould be fore-known, than that GOD ſhould any ways be the author of ſin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of men. The firſt only argues the imperfection of our underſtandings; but the other lays the greateſt blemiſh and imperfection that can be upon the divine nature.

So that this difficult controverſy about the fore-knowledge of GOD is brought to this point, whether

a man had better believe, that infinite knowledge may be able to fore-know things in a way which our finite understanding cannot comprehend: or to ascribe something to GOD, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the author of sin. The first is only a modest and just acknowledgment of our own ignorance; the last is the utmost and greatest absurdity that a man can be brought to; and to say that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of GOD, unless we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreasonable, than if an ignorant man should deny a difficult proposition in Euclid or Archimedes to be demonstrated, because he knows not how to demonstrate it.

5. And consequently fore-knowledge and liberty may very well consist; and notwithstanding GOD's fore-knowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

Lastly, That GOD doth not deal with men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad use of their liberty, but according to the nature and reason of things; and therefore if he be long-suffering toward sinners, and do not cut them off upon the first provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of repentance, and use all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his grace to excite good resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their wilful obstinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and God's goodness and patience as much to be acknowledged, as if GOD did not foresee the abuse of it; because his foresight and knowledge of what they would do, laid no necessity upon them to do what they did.

If a prince had the privilege of fore-knowledge as GOD

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GOD hath, and did certainly foresee, that a great many of his subjects would certainly incur the penalty of his laws, and that others would abuse his goodness and clemency to them; yet if he would govern them like free and reasonable creatures, he ought to make the same wise laws to restrain their exorbitancy, and to use the same clemency in all cases that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foresee what they would do, nor how they would abuse his clemency; for it is nevertheless fit to make wise and reasonable laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, though it were certainly foreseen that they that are governed would act very foolishly and unreasonably in the use of their liberty. It is great goodness in GOD to give men the means and opportunity of being saved, though they abuse this goodness to their farther ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obstinacy in men, which he certainly foresees will end in their ruin; and may with great seriousness and sincerity wish they would do otherwise, and were as wise to do good, as they are wilful to do evil. And thus he is represented in scripture, as regretting the mischief which men wilfully bring upon themselves; "O that they were "wise, O that they would understand, and consi- "der their latter end!"

And this is sufficient to vindicate the goodness of GOD in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befals them for their wilful contempt and abuse of it.

I shall draw some inferences from this whole discourse upon this argument.

I. This shews the unreasonableness and perverse disingenuity of men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in sin from the long-suffering

ing of GOD, which above all things in the world should melt and soften them. Thou hast sinned, and art liable to the justice of GOD, sentence is gone forth, but GOD respites the execution of it, and hath granted thee a reprieve, and time and opportunity to sue out thy pardon. Now what use ought we in reason to make of this patience of GOD towards us? We ought certainly "to break off our sins by a speedy "repentance, lest iniquity be our ruin;" immediately to sue out our pardon, and "to make our peace "with GOD, while we are yet in the way," and to resolve, never any more willingly to offend that GOD who is so gracious and merciful, so long-suffering and full of compassion. But what use do men commonly make of it? They take occasion to confirm and strengthen themselves in their wickedness, and to reason themselves into vain and groundless hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, because punishment doth not come, therefore to hasten it, and to draw it down upon ourselves? Because it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Because there is yet a possibility of escaping it, therefore to take a certain course to make it unavoidable? Because there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our case desperate and past remedy? See how unreasonably men bring ruin upon themselves; so that well might the Psalmist ask that question, "Have "all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?"

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But their folly and unreasonableness is not so great, but their perverseness and disingenuity is greater. To sin, because GOD is long-suffering, is to be evil, because he is good, and to provoke him, because he spares us; it is to strive with GOD, and to contend with his goodness, as if we were resolved to try the utmost length of his patience; and because GOD is

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loth to punish, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is so contrary to his inclination.

II. This may serve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abusing the long-suffering of GOD. It is a provocation of the highest nature, because it is to trample upon his dearest attributes, those which he most delights and glories in, his goodness and mercy; for the long-suffering of GOD is his goodness to the guilty, and his mercy to those who deserve to be miserable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more speedy, and more intolerable, than the abuse of GOD's goodness and patience. After GOD had born long with that rebellious people, the children of Israel, and notwithstanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had spared them ten times, at last he sets his seal to their ruin, Heb. iii. 8, 9. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provo- "cation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: "when your fathers proved me, and saw my works "forty years." This was a high provocation indeed, to harden their hearts under the patience and long-suffering of GOD, after forty years trial and experience of it; v. 10. "Wherefore I was grieved "with that generation, and said, They are a people "that do err in their hearts, for they have not known "my ways." And what was the issue of all this? Upon this GOD takes up a fixed resolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the blessings he had promised to bestow upon them; "He "sware in his wrath, that they should not enter in- "to his rest. To whom sware he, that they should "not enter into his rest, but to them that believed "not?" Or, as the word may be rendered, "to them "that were disobedient?" that is, to them who went

went on in their rebellion against him, after he had suffered their manners forty years. SERM. CLI.

And as the abuse of GOD's patience renders our destruction more certain, so more speedy and more intolerable. We think that because GOD suffers long, he will suffer always; and because punishment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the sooner for this: so our LORD tells us, Luke xii. When "the servant said, His LORD delayed his "coming; the LORD of that servant shall come "in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour "when he is not aware, and shall cut him in sunder, "and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." None so like to be surprised by the judgment of GOD, as those who trespass so boldly upon his patience.

III. To persuade us to make a right use of the patience and long-suffering of GOD, and to comply with the merciful end and design of GOD therein.

1. It is the design of GOD's long-suffering, to give us a space of repentance. Were it not that GOD had this design and reasonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a sinner for one moment, but would execute his judgments upon him so soon as ever he had offended: this our SAVIOUR declares to us by the parable of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. 6. Were it not that GOD expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would "cut us down", and not suffer us, "to cumber the ground"; after he had "waited "three years, seeking fruit and finding none, he "spares it one year more, to see if it would bear fruit."

2. The long-suffering of GOD is a great encouragement to repentance. We see by his patience that he is not ready to take advantage against us; that he spares us when we offend, is a very good sign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural

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light would reason, and so the king of Nineveh, a heathen, reasons, "Who can tell if GOD will turn and "repent?" But we are fully assured of this by the gracious declarations of the gospel, and the way of pardon and forgiveness which is therein established through faith in the blood of JESUS CHRIST, who was made "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Therefore the long-suffering of GOD should be a powerful argument to us "to break off our sins by "repentance:" for this is the end of GOD's patience; "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing "that any should perish, but that all should come "to repentance. He hath no pleasure in the death "of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn "from his way and live." GOD every where expresseth a vehement desire and earnest expectation of our repentance and conversion; Jer. iv. 14. "O "Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that "thou mayest be saved." And chap. 13. 27. "Wo unto thee Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made "clean? when shall it once be?" He who is so patient as to the punishment of our sins, is almost impatient of our repentance for them; "Wilt thou "not be made clean? when shall it once be?" And can we stand out against his earnest desire of our happiness, whom we have so often and so long provoked to make us miserable?

Let us then return into ourselves, and think seriously what our case and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the patience of GOD hath suffered our manners, and waited for our repentance, and how inevitable and intolerable the misery of those must be who live and die in the contempt and abuse of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked lives, and say, "What have we done?" How careless have

we been of our own happineſs, and what pains have we taken to undo ourſelves?

Let us ſpeedily ſet about this work, becauſe we do not know how long the patience of GOD may laſt, and the opportunities of our ſalvation be continued to us. This day of GOD's grace and patience will have an end, therefore, as the prophet exhorts, Iſa. lv. 6. "Seek the LORD while he may be found, and call "upon him while he is near." Now GOD graciouſly invites ſinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them depart from him, when they ſhall cry, "LORD, "LORD, open unto us," and the door of mercy ſhall be ſhut againſt them.

All the while thou delayeſt this neceſſary work, thou ventureſt thy immortal ſoul, and putteſt thy eternal ſalvation upon a deſperate hazard; and ſhould GOD ſnatch thee ſuddenly away in an impenitent ſtate, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and GOD is yet reconcileable, but death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the beſt thy life is uncertain, and death will infallibly put a period to this day of GOD's grace and patience.

Repentance is a work ſo neceſſary, that methinks no man ſhould loſe ſo much time as to deliberate, whether he ſhould ſet about it or not; *de neceſſariis nulla eſt deliberatio*; "no man deliberates about what "he muſt do, or be undone if he do it not." It is a work of ſo great conſequence and concernment, and the delay of it ſo infinitely dangerous, that one would think no wiſe man could entertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and ſtupidity can there be,

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be, than for men to venture their immortal souls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlasting consequence?

This day of GOD's patience is the great opportunity of our salvation, and if we let it slip, it is never to be recovered: if we mis-improve this time of our life, we shall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our state of trial ends with this life, after that GOD will prove us no more; then we shall wish, "O that I had known in that my day, "the things which belonged to my peace, but now "they are hid from mine eyes; therefore to day, "whilst it is called to day, harden not your hearts, "make no tarrying to turn to the LORD, and put "not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the "wrath of the LORD break forth, and in thy se-"curity thou shalt be destroyed; exercise repent-"ance in the time of health, and defer not till death "to be justified."

SERMON CLII.

The power of GOD.

PSAL. LXII. 11.

GOD *hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto* GOD.

IN treating of the attributes of GOD, I have considered those which relate to the divine understanding, to which I referred his knowledge and wisdom; those also which relate to the divine will; viz.

viz. GOD's juſtice, truth, holineſs, and goodneſs: I come now to conſider his power of acting, which is his omnipotency; this I ſhall ſpeak to from theſe words. SERM. CLII.

In the beginning of this Pſalm, David declares that GOD was the great object of his truſt and confidence, and that all his hopes and expectation of ſafety and deliverance were from him, v. 1, 2. And this makes him challenge his enemies for all their miſchievous qualities and devices againſt him, as vain attempts, v. 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himſelf to continue his truſt and confidence in GOD, from whom was all his expectation, and who was able to ſave and deliver him; v. 5, 6, 7. And from his example and experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to truſt in GOD, v. 8. and that from two arguments.

1. Becauſe all other objects of our truſt and confidence are vain and inſufficient, and will fail thoſe that rely upon them. If we rely upon any thing in this world, it muſt either be perſons or things; but we cannot ſafely repoſe our truſt in either of theſe. Not in perſons: they may be reduced to one of theſe two heads, either high or low: Thoſe that are of a mean condition, it would be in vain to truſt them; they that cannot ſecure themſelves from meanneſs, cannot ſecure others from miſchief, "men of low degree "are vanity:" But the great ones of the world, they would ſeem to promiſe ſomething of aſſiſtance and ſecurity to us; but if we depend upon them, they will fruſtrate us, "men of high degree are a lie." As for the things of the world, that which men uſually place their confidence in, is riches; theſe are either got by unlawful, or lawful means; if they be ill gotten, by oppreſſion or robbery, they will be ſo far from ſecuring us from evil, that they will bring it upon us; if they

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they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature, that we have little reaſon to place our hopes in them; "if riches increaſe, ſet not your hearts upon them," "that is, your hope; for heart in ſcripture ſignifies any of the affections.

2. Becauſe GOD is the proper object of our truſt and confidence. We may ſafely rely upon any one, in whom theſe two things concur, a power to help us, and goodneſs to incline him ſo to do. Now David tells us, that both theſe are eminently in GOD, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; power, v. 11. and goodneſs, v. 12.

I ſhall ſpeak to that which David makes the firſt ground of our confidence, the power of GOD; power belongs to GOD: For which he brings the teſtimony of GOD himſelf, "once hath GOD ſpoken, "yea twice have I heard this." Some interpreters trouble themſelves about the meaning of this expreſſion, as if it did refer to ſome particular revelation of GOD; and then again they are troubled how to reconcile GOD's ſpeaking this but once, with David's hearing it twice: but I do not love to ſpy myſteries in theſe expreſſions which are capable of a plain ſenſe; for I underſtand no more by it but this, that GOD hath ſeveral times revealed this; he frequently declared himſelf by this attribute, "once, "yea twice," that is, he hath ſpoken it often and David heard it often. This is anſwerable to that phraſe of the Latins, *Semel atque iterum*; and it is uſual in all writers, to uſe a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among the poets, *Felices ter & amplius*, Hor. And ſo in the poetical writers of ſcripture, Job v. 19. he hath "delivered thee in "ſix troubles, yea, in ſeven there ſhall no evil "touch thee;" that is, in ſeveral and various troubles.

bles. Eccleſ. xi. 2. "Give a portion to ſeven, and "alſo to eight;" that is, diſtribute thy charity to many; and which is neareſt to this, Job xl. 5. "Once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer; yea "twice, but I will proceed no farther:" that is, I have had ſeveral diſcourſes with my friends; and xxxiii. 14. "GOD ſpeaketh once, yea twice, in a dream, in "a viſion of the night;" that is, GOD reveals himſelf in ſeveral ways and manners to men; ſo here "GOD hath ſpoken once, yea twice," that is, GOD hath often declared this. And if I would be ſo curious to refer to a particular declaration of GOD, I ſhould think, that it related either to the preface to the law, "I am the LORD thy GOD," that is, the great and powerful GOD, "that brought thee out of "the land of Egypt;" or rather to the declaration which GOD made of himſelf to Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, by the name of the Almighty GOD, Gen. xvii. 1. Concerning which revelation of GOD, it is ſaid expreſly, Exod. vi. 3. "I appeared unto Abraham, "and Iſaac, and Jacob, by the name of GOD Al-"mighty, but by my name Jehovah, was I not "known to them."

But that which I deſign to ſpeak to, is the propoſition itſelf, that power belongs to GOD;" that is, that the excellency of power, power in it's higheſt degree and perfection; "all power belongs to GOD," that is, that omnipotence is a property or perfection of the divine nature.

In the handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the omnipotence of GOD.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to GOD.

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the omnipotence of GOD. And this I ſhall conſider,

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I. As to the principle. And,

II. As to the exercise of it.

I. As to the principle, it is an ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks power and perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of GOD; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer; an ability to do all things which are consistent with itself, and with the divine nature and perfection; by which we must mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himself, for what he is said to do within himself, the acts of his understanding and will, as we conceive his will to be distinct from his power, are not to be referred to his omnipotence. To have a right conception of omnipotence we must imagine the most perfect active principle that we can, and it is still something more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual resistance, which can check and countermand at pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine besides this; because we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things

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at once and in an inſtant, and that with eaſe. We can but do one thing at once, and the greater and more conſiderable it is, the more time it will take us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done; but GOD, to whoſe knowledge all things are preſent at once, and together, and the acts of whoſe will are as quick and perfect as of his underſtanding, hath a power anſwerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as eaſy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as ſucceſſively, and in time. For this is the privilege of an infinite ſpirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or inſtruments, as every ſpirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, becauſe he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing elſe but a willing that ſuch a thing be done, and *ipſo facto* every thing is ſo, as he wills it ſhould be, and when he wills it ſhould be; as if things did ſtart up into being, or vaniſh out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and ſculk again into nothing, and undergo ſuch and ſuch changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, "at "the beck of his will." And this is the moſt perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the ſcripture ſeems to expreſs to us when it repreſents GOD as "making things by his word, upholding all things "by the word of his power," as if he did but "ſpeak "the word," and ſay, "Let ſuch a thing be, and "it was ſo;" as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an expreſs act of the divine will, which is all we can underſtand by GOD's ſpeaking, by his word, and voice, and ſaying, "Let things be"; but the leaſt that it can ſignify, is the quick and ſpeedy manner of working,

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whereby GOD is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a word can be spoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant; so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him? At the first creation of things there was nothing to resist him; and since the creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and consequently all whose power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is subject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite power of GOD; so that we may imagine the divine power would pass through all the resistance that all created power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more ease than a bullet passeth through the thin air; or a man would pass through a net of cobweb.

5. The most perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the omnipotence of GOD as to the principle, which hath no bounds and limits. And,

II. As to the exercise of it, it is only limited by the divine will and wisdom. The divine will determines it to it's exercise, the divine wisdom directs, and regulates the exercise of it; that is, GOD exerciseth his power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such effects, and in order to such ends and purposes, as seem best to his wisdom. Hence he is said "to act all things

" according to his good pleasure," and " according to the counsel of his will," that is, freely and wisely.

As to the extent of this power, I said it was an ability to do all things that are consistent with itself, and with the nature and perfection of GOD.

First, that are consistent with itself, that is, with a power to do all things. It is a contradiction to imagine, that omnipotence can do that, which, if it could be done, would render all power insignificant. Upon this account, the divine power is not said to extend to the working of any thing which implies a contradiction, and the terms whereof speak a repugnancy to one another, and mutually destroy one another, and the doing whereof is contrary to the nature of the thing which is supposed to be done, that is, is nonsense, and cannot be imagined to be. For example, that a thing should be, and not be at the same time. For a power to make a thing to be, so as it should not be while it is, gnifies nothing; because such a being as is not, is nothing; and to make such a being, would be to do nothing, and consequently such a power would signify nothing. So likewise we cannot say, that the divine power can cause, that the same thing should be made and not be made, that that which hath been, should not have been; for the power which makes a thing so as that it was not made, and causeth a thing to have been, so as that it hath not been, does nothing; and consequently is no power. Nor can we say, that the divine power can effect that any thing should be made by itself, that is, be the cause of it's own being; for that would be to cause that a thing should be before it is, that is, be, when it is not, which signifies nothing. We cannot say that the divine

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power can effect, that twice two ſhould not make four; for that would be to cauſe that things ſhould not be what they are, if they be at all, which is to cauſe that things ſhould be and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot ſay, the divine power can make a ſound to be ſeen, and colour to be heard; for that would be to make colour and ſound all one, that is, things that differ, to be the ſame while they differ, which is to make colour and ſound not to be colour and ſound while they are ſo, which is to do nothing, and conſequently argues no power.

We cannot ſay, the divine power can make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil; and on the contrary: or that which is neceſſarily true to be falſe; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always good to be ſometimes evil, that is, to be evil whilſt it is good, that is to make good and evil all one; which is to bring two things together, which ſo ſoon as they do exiſt, deſtroy one another, which is to no purpoſe, becauſe it is to do juſt nothing; and there is the ſame reaſon of true and falſe.

We cannot ſay, that the power of GOD can cauſe that the ſame thing ſhould be hot and cold, dead and alive at the ſame time; becauſe theſe deſtroy one another, and if they were both, neither of them would be, and ſo the effect we attribute to this power would be nothing.

We cannot ſay, that the divine power can effect, that the ſame impreſſion ſhould give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward at the ſame time; that the ſame body ſhould be in two contrary poſtures, in motion and at reſt, and in ſeveral

veral places, which are the contradictions of tranſubſtantiation; for, for the ſame body to be at the ſame time in two ſeveral places, is to be limited and circumſcribed by each of theſe, that is, ſo to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; ſo that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor in any other beſides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this, nor any other beſides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where elſe; ſo that a power to make a body to be in two places at once, is a power to make it to be no where, that is, not to be at all, which is no power; and there is the ſame reaſon of the ſame body's being in contrary motion, or in motion and at reſt, or in two contrary poſtures at the ſame time.

So that by all theſe inſtances it appears, that a power to do any thing which implies a contradiction, and is repugnant to the nature of things, ſignifies nothing, and the ſuppoſed effect of it is only to bring terms together, which if they could be brought together, ſo ſoon as they meet, will mutually take away and deſtroy one another, which would be vain and to no purpoſe.

I have the more explicitly laid open theſe contradictions, with relation to the groſs doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, in which all, or moſt of the contradictions which I have mentioned are involved. I know they ſtiffly deny, that theſe contradictions follow from that doctrine, and uſe pitiful ſhifts to avoid them; but being not able to ſatisfy themſelves that way, if the worſt ſhould come to the worſt, they can grant theſe contradictions, but then they fly to the power of GOD, which can do things which we call contradictions; or elſe they ſay, there are

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as many contradictions in the doctrine of the Trinity, which all Christians believe. And thus they reproach christianity to defend popery; and if they cannot persuade men to be papists, do what they can to make them atheists, or at least, to hinder them from being Christians: but there is not so much malice in this objection, but there is as little strength. Is it any contradiction, that the same thing should be three and one in several respects? which is all that the scripture teacheth concerning the Trinity: but if men will undertake to explain this more particularly than GOD thought fit to do, and do it in such a manner as that they cannot free themselves from contradiction, let them look to it, the christian religion is not at all concerned in this, farther than to censure such mens boldness and curiosity.

But against this exemption of things that imply a contradiction from the compass and extent of the divine power, there are two objections which are more considerable, and deserve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant GOD's fore-knowledge of future events, which seem to us to be impossible to be foreknown; now why may we not as well grant that GOD can do things which seem to us impossible to be done by any other power, as fore-know things which it is impossible for any understanding to know? For why should we pretend to know the utmost of what infinite power can do, any more than the utmost of what infinite understanding can know?

Ans. I know no reason but that the argument should be granted, if there were an equal necessity of granting the possibility of those things, which seem to us impossible to be done, that there is of granting the possibility of fore-knowing future contingencies,

cies, though they seem to us impossible to be known. We must grant the possibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, because the scripture, which we believe to be a divine revelation, expressly tells us, that GOD doth foreknow them, and gives us instances of it in several prophecies and predictions. Now if any man can shew me as expres texts which say, that GOD can make a body to be in two places at once, I will believe it, though I do not see how it is possible; because it is reasonable I should believe that infinite power can do many things, the possibility of which my finite understanding cannot reach. Now whereas the papists say, the scripture hath said that from which this necessarily follows, viz. "This "is my body;" this is not enough, unless they could either prove, that it is necessary to understand all texts of scripture in a rigorous and strict propriety of the letter, without admitting of any trope or figure in the words; which they do not pretend: or else shew a clear reason, why this should be understood so, more than a thousand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be farther argued; if we grant in one case, that those things which seem to be contradictions to us may be possible, why not in all cases? Unless we had some certain way of distinguishing between seeming contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all contradictions possible, then there is no reason to exempt these from the extent of the divine power; but we may safely say, that the divine power can make a thing to be, and not to be at the same time. To this I answer,

1. I do not grant, that any thing, which seems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be possible, unless I have higher assurance and

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greater reaſon to believe it to be poſſible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction; for example, ſuppoſe it were clearly revealed in ſcripture, that two bodies may be in the ſame place and at the ſame time (which is not, nor any thing like it) then having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher aſſurance and greater reaſon to believe it poſſible, than that it is a contradiction; and conſequently I have reaſon to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the ſame thing may be, and not be at the ſame time: but though in caſe of divine revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; yet I am not without great neceſſity and clear evidence to offer violence to reaſon, and affront the faculty of underſtanding which GOD hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; which the papiſts do in the buſineſs of tranſubſtantiation, without any evidence of revelation, and conſequently without neceſſity.

2. But if this were revealed in ſcripture, that the ſame thing may be and not be at the ſame time, I could have no reaſon to believe that, becauſe I could have no aſſurance, if that were true, that the ſcriptures were a divine revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true, that the ſame thing may be and not be, then a divine revelation may be no divine revelation, and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the ſame time not to believe it, and ſo all things would fall into uncertainty, and the foundation of all aſſurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of faith and practice, would be taken away.

The 2d objection is from the power of creation,

which is generally acknowledged to be a making of something out of nothing; now say the objectors, this seems as palpable a contradiction as any thing else. SERM. CLII.

Answ. To us indeed, who converse with material things, and never saw any thing made, but out of pre-existent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing should be created, that is produced out of nothing: but every thing that is strange is not a contradiction. It is strange to us, and hard to conceive, that there should be such a thing as a spirit, who never saw, nor can see any thing but matter; and yet we grant there are spirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing should be made, but out of matter; and yet spirit, if it were made of any thing pre-existent, cannot be made of matter: but if we will attend to those common dictates of reason, which every man, whether he will or no, must assent to, we may easily understand creation to be possible, and free from contradiction. For the clearing of this, I will proceed by these steps.

1. The true notion of creation is the bringing of something into being, which before had no being at all; for the phrase of making something out of nothing, or out of no pre-existent matter, does mislead our understanding into odd conceits, as if nothing could be the material cause of something, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one must grant, that something is; for we see that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one must grant, that something is of itself, whether matter, or that being which we call GOD.

4. Every one must grant, that that which was of itself was always; for nothing can begin to be of itself.

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5. It is much more easy to conceive how a thing, that once was not, might sometimes be brought into being by another, than how a thing should be always of itself; for that which once was not is supposed to have something before it, by which it might be made, though not out of which it was made; but that which was always neither had nor could have any thing by which, or out of which it could be made. And why cannot a thing come into being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it, out of which it should be?

Secondly, I exempt those things from the extent of omnipotence, which imply imperfection, which are contrary to the nature and perfection of GOD, both natural and moral imperfections; for these also destroy power, because they are not arguments of power, but of impotence. Natural imperfections; as to die, to be sick, to be in want, to eat, to sleep, to forget, &c. Moral imperfections, those which contradict the holiness of GOD, as sin and vice, or to compel any to sin; which contradict his goodness, as to be cruel; which contradict his truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promise, to deny himself; Tit. i. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 13. Jam. i. 13. he is said to be ἀπείρας κακῶν; contrary to the constancy and immutability of his nature, as to change his decree, to repent; contrary to justice and equity, as for ever to spare and to pardon obstinate sinners, eternally to punish innocent and good men; for these are moral imperfections, and contradict the holiness, and truth, and goodness, and justice, and immutability of the divine nature; and that distinction between GOD's absolute and ordinate power, that is,

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that GOD hath an absolute power of doing some things, which yet upon supposition of his decree, or promise, or goodness, or justice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unless men mean by it only this, that some things, which argue an imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is most true, but both these are absolutely and equally impossible to GOD. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, that this perfection belongs to GOD; and this I shall shew,

I. From the dictates of natural light.

II. From the scripture, or divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the most usual titles which the heathens gave to their supreme deity, *optimus maximus*; next to his goodness they placed his greatness, which does chiefly appear in his power; and they did not only attribute a great power to him but an omnipotence. *Nihil est quod Deus efficere non potest*, saith Tully de Div. Now their natural reason did convince them, that this perfection did belong to GOD by these three arguments.

1. From those two great instances and expressions of his power, creation and providence; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preservation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodness, and regulated by wisdom. Hence they gave those titles to GOD of *opifex rerum* and *rector mundi*. I say generally, I except Aristotle, who supposed the world not to have been made, but to have been from eternity; and Epicurus with his followers, who ascribed the regular and orderly frame of nature to a happy casualty and fortunate concourse of atoms: but generally the wiser did look upon the vast frame

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of nature, this ſtately fabrick of the world, and the upholding and preſerving of it, as an argument of a divine and inviſible power. And ſo the apoſtle tells us, Rom. i. 20. that by the light of nature, "the inviſible things of GOD were clearly ſeen by "the things that were made, even his eternal power "and godhead."

2. Becauſe all other perfections without this would be inſignificant and ineffectual, or elſe could not be at all. Without this goodneſs would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonſtration of itſelf; knowledge would be an idle ſpeculation; and wiſdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an uſeleſs thing. There would be no ſuch thing as juſtice, if the divine nature were without a power to reward and puniſh; no ſuch thing as faithfulneſs, if he had not a power to perform what he promiſes; no providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power to take upon him to govern and intermeddle in the affairs of the world.

3. Without this there could be no religion. Take away the power of GOD, and there can be no foundation of faith and truſt, no reaſon for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent being that could do nothing. The ſanction of GOD's laws would be taken away. To give authority to laws, there muſt not only be a right to command, but power to back thoſe commands; the grand ſecurity and laſt reſort of all government and authority is power; James iv. 12. "There is one law-giver, who is able to ſave, and "to deſtroy." None can be a law-giver, but he that hath this power, to reward and puniſh, to make

make men happy or miſerable, "to ſave, or to deſtroy." Men would not pray to GOD, nor make any addreſs to him, if they did not believe he were able to ſupply their wants, and relieve them in their ſtraits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales conſenſiſſent alloquendi ſurda numina & inefficaces deos*, Sen. There would be no encouragement for men to ſerve GOD, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them, and bring them to happineſs, and to defend them againſt all the enemies of their welfare, ſo that it ſhould not be in the power of the moſt malicious ſpirits to hinder them of their happineſs. SERM. CLII.

II. From ſcripture or divine revelation. In producing texts to this purpoſe, I will proceed by theſe ſteps.

1. Take notice of thoſe which in general aſcribe power, and might, and ſtrength to GOD. Pſal. xxiv. 8. "The LORD ſtrong and mighty. So girt with "power; the mighty GOD; thine is the greatneſs "and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the "power, and the glory." Of the ſame nature are thoſe places which call upon all creatures to aſcribe this to GOD; "Give unto the LORD, ye mighty, "give unto the LORD glory and ſtrength."

2. Thoſe which aſcribe this to GOD in an eminent degree. Job ix. 4. "He is mighty in ſtrength; "excellent in power, who is like unto him? The "LORD Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength."

3. Thoſe texts which aſcribe ſuch a power as tranſcends any human or created power. Such as thoſe which expreſs all the power which men have to be derived from GOD; John xix. 11. "Thou "couldeſt have no power at all, except it were "given thee from above." And thoſe which advance the power of GOD above the power of men;

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Luke xviii. 27. " The things which are impoſſible " with men, are poſſible with GOD; he is able to " do exceeding abundantly above all that we can " aſk or think." Eph. iii. 20. 2 Chron. xx. 6. Job ix. 4. " According to his mighty power, " whereby he is able to ſubdue all things to himſelf," Phil. iii. 21. Dan. iv. 35. Thoſe which declare all things to be equally eaſy to him, and nothing difficult; " There is nothing too hard for thee," Jer. xxxii. 17. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

4. Thoſe which aſcribe all power to him, by the titles of almighty, all-ſufficient, Gen. xvii. 1. Rev. iv. 8, 11. xv. 3. xvi. 7. xix. 26. Job xlii. 2. " Thou canſt do all things," Matth. xix. 6. Mark xx. 27. Luke i. 37.

I have diſpatched what I propoſed upon this argument, give me leave to apply all in the following particulars.

Uſe. Firſt, the conſideration of GOD's omnipotence may cauſe terror to wicked men. All this power which I have deſcribed, or rather, which is ſo great that I cannot deſcribe it, is engaged againſt ſinners; " His power and his wrath is againſt all " that forſake him," Ezra viii. 22. And who knows what thoſe words ſignify, Pſal. xc. 11. " Who knoweth the power of thine anger? As is " thy fear, ſo is thy wrath." There is no paſſion in the heart of man more infinite than our fear, it troubles us with jealouſy and ſuſpicion of the utmoſt that may happen; but when we have extended our fears to the utmoſt, the power of GOD's wrath reacheth farther. Whenever we ſin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite power to do it's worſt to us; Job xv. 25. ſpeaking of the wicked man, " He ſtretcheth out his hand againſt GOD, and

" ſtrengtheneth

" ſtrengtheneth himſelf againſt the Almighty." Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miſerable for ever?" Will ye pro- " voke the LORD to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than " he?" Becauſe he doth nothing againſt thee for the preſent, thinkeſt thou he can do nothing? Nah. i. 3. " He is ſlow to anger, and great in power, and will " not acquit the wicked." There is a day coming, when " the Son of man ſhall come in the clouds of " heaven, with power and great glory." SERM. CLII.

Secondly, The conſideration of GOD's omnipotence ſhould check the pride and vain confidence of men. What have we to be proud of? " What have " we that we have not received? Where then is " cauſe of boaſting? Who may glory in his ſight?" Thoſe that have the greateſt power ſhould remember whence it is derived, and render back the glory of it to the fountain of it. Pſal. xxix. 1. " Give " unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the " LORD glory and ſtrength." So likewiſe it ſhould take men off from relying upon their own ſtrength, which at the beſt is but " an arm of fleſh," as the ſcripture calls it, for the weakneſs of it. Do we not ſee, that many times " the battle is not to the ſtrong?" That things are not done " by might and by power, " but by the ſpirit of the LORD." When he appears againſt the moſt potent, " their hearts melt within " them, and there is no more ſpirit left in them," as it is ſaid of the mighty inhabitants of Canaan, Joſh. v. 1.

Thirdly, We ſhould make this omnipotence of GOD the object of our truſt and confidence. This is the moſt proper uſe we can make of this doctrine, as David does in this Pſalm; and this was uſed for a form of bleſſing the people in the name of GOD; Pſal. cxxxvi. 3. " The LORD that made heaven and

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" earth, bleſs thee." And David, when he magnifies GOD's deliverance of his people from the multitude of their enemies, reſolves it into this, " our " help ſtandeth in the name of the LORD, who made " heaven and earth." Thus did the great pattern and example of faith encourage and ſupport his confidence in GOD in a very difficult trial; he ſtaggered not at it, becauſe " he believed GOD, who quicken- " eth the dead, and calleth thoſe things that be not, " as though they were: therefore againſt hope he " believed in hope, &c." Rom. iv. 17, &c. This gives life to all our devotion, to be perſuaded that " GOD is able to do for us exceedingly above what " we can aſk or think," and that " his is the king- " dom, the power and the glory."

I ſhall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the power of GOD.

I. Labour to be ſuch perſons, to whom GOD hath promiſed that he will engage and employ his omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from the Almighty, we muſt " walk before him, " and be perfect," as he ſaid to Abraham. Good men have a peculiar intereſt in GOD's power; hence he is called " the ſtrength of Iſrael," and " the " mighty one of Iſrael." If we do what GOD requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his power, and exert his arm for us; but if we diſobey, we muſt expect he will manifeſt his power againſt us, Ez. viii. 22. When we " do well," we may " commit the keeping of our ſouls to him," 1 Pet. iv. 19.

II. Our expectations from the omnipotence of GOD muſt be with ſubmiſſion to his pleaſure, and goodneſs, and wiſdom; we muſt not expect that GOD will manifeſt his power, when we think there is occaſion

occaſion for it; but when it ſeems beſt to him, he will ſo employ his omnipotence, as to manifeſt his goodneſs and wiſdom.

And with theſe two cautions, we may rely upon him in all our wants, both ſpiritual and temporal; for his divine power can "give us all things that "pertain to life and godlineſs;" 2 Pet. i. 3. We may truſt him at all times, for the omnipotent GOD "neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth; the Almighty "fainteth not, neither is he weary: truſt ye in the "LORD for ever, for in the LORD Jehovah is ever-"laſting ſtrength."

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The ſpirituality of the divine nature.

JOHN iv. 24.

GOD *is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.*

THESE are the words of our SAVIOUR to the woman of Samaria, who was ſpeaking to him of the difference between the Samaritans and the Jews concerning religion; ver. 20. "Our fa-"thers worſhipped in this mountain; but ye ſay, "that in Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to "worſhip." CHRIST tells her, "the time was "coming, when the worſhippers of GOD ſhould "neither be confined to that mountain, nor to "Jeruſalem; but men ſhould worſhip the father in "ſpirit and in truth;" when this carnal, and cere-

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monial, and typical worſhip of GOD ſhould be exalted into a more ſpiritual, a more real, and true, and ſubſtantial religion, which ſhould not be confined to one temple, but ſhould be univerſally diffuſed through the world. Now ſuch a worſhip as this is moſt agreeable to the nature of GOD; for he is a ſpirit, and "thoſe who worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth." In the words we have,

Firſt, A propoſition laid down, "GOD is a ſpirit."

Secondly, A corollary, or inference, deduced from it, "they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth." I ſhall ſpeak of the propoſition, as that which concerns my preſent deſign; and afterward ſpeak ſomething to the corollary, or inference, deduced from it, together with ſome other inferences drawn from this truth, by way of application.

Firſt, "That GOD is a ſpirit." This expreſſion is ſingular, and not to be parallelled again in the ſcripture; indeed we have often mention made in the ſcripture of "the ſpirit of GOD," and "the "ſpirit of the LORD," which ſignifies a divine power and energy; and of "the holy ſpirit," ſignifying the third perſon in the Trinity; GOD is called "the "GOD of the ſpirits of all fleſh;" Num. xvi. 22. xxvii. 16. much in the ſame ſenſe, as he is called "the father of ſpirits," Heb. xii. 9. that is, the creator of the ſouls of men; but we no where meet with this expreſſion, or any other equivalent to it, that "GOD is a ſpirit," but only in this place; nor had it been uſed here, but to prove, that the beſt worſhip of GOD, that which is moſt proper to him, is ſpiritual: ſo that the thing which our SAVIOUR here intends, is not to prove the ſpiritual nature of GOD, but that his worſhip ought to be ſpiritual; nor indeed is there any neceſſity that it ſhould have

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been any where said in scripture, that "GOD is a "spirit," it being the natural notion of a GOD; no more than it is necessary that it should be told us, that GOD is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like; or that the scripture should prove to us the being of a GOD. All these are manifest by the light of nature, and if the scripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is usually in order to some farther purpose.

For we are to know, that the scripture supposeth us to be men, and to partake of the common notions of human nature, and therefore doth not teach us philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those things which are born with us; but supposeth the knowledge of these, and makes use of these common principles and notions which are in us concerning GOD, and the immortality of our souls, and the life to come, to excite us to our duty, and quicken our endeavours after happiness. For I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, is any where expressly delivered in scripture, but taken for granted; in like manner, that the scripture doth not solicitously instruct us in the natural notions which we have of GOD, but supposeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not so much in order to knowledge as to practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this expression, which doth set forth to us the nature of GOD, is but once used in scripture, and that brought in upon occasion, and for another purpose, because it is a thing naturally known. Plato says, that GOD is ἀσώματος, without body. In like manner Tully, *Nec enim Deus ipse qui intelligitur à nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quædam soluta & libera, segregata ab omni concretione mortali*; "we cannot conceive of GOD, but as of a pure "mind,

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" mind, intirely free from all mortal composition or " mixture." And Plutarch after him, νῆς ἔν ὁ θεὸς, χωριστὸν εἰδῶν, τελέως τὸ ἀμιγὲς πάσης ὕλης, μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, " GOD is a mind, an ab- " stract being, pure from all matter, and disintangled " from whatever is passible or capable of suffering."

So that natural light informing us that GOD is a spirit, there was no need why the scripture should inculcate this: it is an excellent medium or argument to prove that the worship of GOD should chiefly be spiritual; and although it was not necessary that it should have been mentioned for itself, that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not otherwise know, yet the wisdom of GOD, by the express mention of this, seems to have provided against an error, which some weaker and grosser spirits might be subject to. You know GOD is pleased, by way of condescension and accommodation of himself to our capacity, to represent himself to us in scripture by human imperfections, and gives such descriptions of himself as if he had a body, and bodily members; now to prevent any error or mistake that might be occasioned hereby, it seems very becoming the wisdom of GOD, somewhere in scripture expressly to declare the spiritual nature of GOD, that none through weakness or wilfulness might entertain gross apprehensions of him. In speaking to this proposition, I shall,

I. Explain what is meant by a spirit.

II. Endeavour to prove to you, that GOD is a spirit.

III. Answer an objection or two.

IV. Draw some inferences or corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the notion of a spirit. I shall not trouble you with the strict philosophical notion

tion of it, as that it is such a substance as is penetrable, that is, may be in the same place with a body, and neither keep out the body, nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is, really separated and torn from one another, as the parts of a body; but I will give you a negative description of it. A spirit is not matter, it doth not fall under any of our senses, it is that which we cannot see nor touch; it is not a body, not flesh, and blood, and bones; for so we find spirit in scripture opposed to flesh and body; Isa. xxxi. 3. "Their horses are flesh, and not spirit." So Luke xxiv. when CHRIST appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, they were terrified, and "supposed "it had been a spirit," v. 39. But he said, "Be- "hold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; "handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and "bones, as ye see me have." The most usual description of a spirit is by these negatives, it is not a body, hath not flesh and bones, doth not consist of matter, or of any thing that falls under our senses, that we can see or touch. SERM. CLIII.

II. For the proof of this proposition, that "GOD "is a spirit." This is not to be proved by way of demonstration; for there is nothing before GOD, or which can be a cause of him; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most natural notion that we have of GOD, is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we must argue concerning the properties which are attributed to GOD, and govern all our reasonings concerning GOD by this; so that when any thing is said of GOD, the best way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to inquire whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, it belongs

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to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any man ask, why I say GOD is so, or so, a spirit, or good, or just? the best reason that can be given is, because these are perfections, and the contrary to these are imperfections. So that if I shew that it would be an imperfection for GOD to be imagined to be a body, or matter, I prove that he is a spirit, because it is an imperfection, that is, an absurdity to imagine him any thing else. To imagine GOD to be a body, or matter, doth evidently contradict four great perfections of GOD.

1. His infiniteness, or the immensity of his being. Grant me but these two things, that there is something in the world besides GOD, some other matter, as the heavens, the air, the earth, and all those things which we see; and grant me that two bodies cannot be in the same place at once, and then it will evidently follow, that where-ever these are, GOD is shut out; and consequently GOD should not be infinite, nor in all places; and so much as there is of another matter in the world besides GOD, so many breaches there would be in the divine nature, so many *Hiatus's*.

2. The knowledge and wisdom of GOD. It cannot be imagined how mere matter can understand, how it can distinctly comprehend such variety of objects, and at one view take in past, present, and to come. Tully, speaking of spirits, saith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest*; "their original "cannot be found upon earth;" for, saith he, "there is no material or bodily thing," *Quod vim memoriæ, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod & præterita teneat, & futura provideat, & complecti possit præsentia; quæ sola divina sunt*; "which hath the "power of memory, of understanding, of thought; "which

"which can retain things past, foresee things future, and comprehend things present; all which "powers are purely divine."

3. Freedom and liberty. For the laws of matter are necessary, nor can we imagine any αὐτεξούσιον, any arbitrary principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we see in Lucretius, "for if (says he) "all things move by certain and necessary laws, and "there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto "each other, so that if you move this, that must "necessarily be moved; whence, saith he, is li- "berty?" *Unde est hæc inquam fatis avulsa voluntas*; "whence is this principle of will, whose mo- "tions are not under any law of necessity."

4. Goodness. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely; so that take away understanding and liberty, and you take away goodness; now take away from GOD infiniteness, and knowledge, and liberty, and goodness, and you divest him of his glory; you take away his most essential perfections. So that these great absurdities following from the supposing of GOD to be mere matter or body, we are to conceive of him as another kind of substance, that is, a spirit. So that I wonder that the author of the Leviathan, who doth more than once expressly affirm, that there can be nothing in the world, but what is material and corporeal, did not see that the necessary consequence of this position is to banish GOD out of the world. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt, he did see it, and was content with the consequence, and willing the world should entertain it; for it is so evident, that by supposing the divine essence to consist of matter the immensity of the divine nature is taken away; and it is also

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ſo utterly unimaginable how mere matter ſhould underſtand, and be endowed with liberty, and conſequently with goodneſs, that I cannot but vehemently ſuſpect the man who denies GOD to be a ſpirit, either to have a groſs and faulty underſtanding, or a very ill-will againſt GOD, and an evil deſign to root out of the minds of men the belief of a GOD. I come in the

III. Place, to conſider the objections.

1. Obj. Why then is GOD repreſented to us ſo often in ſcripture by the parts and members of mens bodies? Anſ. I ſhall only ſay at preſent, that all theſe deſcriptions and repreſentations of GOD are plainly made to comply with our weakneſs, by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation to our capacities.

2. Obj. How is it ſaid that "man was made after the image of GOD," if GOD be a ſpirit, of which there can be no likeneſs nor reſemblance? Anſ. Man is not ſaid to be "made after the image of GOD," in reſpect of the outward ſhape and features of his body; but in reſpect of the qualities of his mind, as holineſs and righteouſneſs, or of his faculties, as underſtanding and will; or, which the text ſeems moſt to favour, in reſpect of his dominion and ſovereignty over the creatures; for in the two former reſpects the angels are made after the image of GOD. Now this ſeems to be ſpoken peculiarly of men; Gen. i. 26. "Let us make man in our own image, "after our own likeneſs, and let them have domi- "nion over the fiſh of the ſea, and the fowls of the "air, &c."

IV. I come now to draw ſome inferences or corollaries from hence, and they ſhall be partly ſpeculative, partly practical.

Firſt,

Firſt, ſpeculative inferences.

1. That GOD is inviſible. The proper object of ſight is colour, and that ariſeth from the various diſpoſition of the parts of matter which cauſe ſeveral reflections of light; now a ſpirit hath no parts nor matter, and therefore is inviſible; 1 Tim. i. 17. "Unto the eternal, immortal, inviſible, the only "wiſe GOD." Heb. xi. 27. "He endured, as ſee-"ing him who is inviſible;" as ſeeing him by an eye of faith, who is inviſible by an eye of ſenſe. 1 Tim. vi. 16. "Whom no man hath ſeen, nor "can ſee."

When Moſes and the elders of Iſrael are ſaid to have ſeen GOD, and Jacob to have "ſeen him face "to face," Exod. ii. 9. Gen. xxxii. 30. it is meant of an angel covered with divine glory and majeſty, as we ſhall ſee if we compare theſe with other texts. When Moſes is ſaid to have "ſpoken to him face to "face," that is familiarly; and ſo Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 19. is ſaid to have "ſeen GOD upon his throne, "and all Iſrael ſcattered up and down;" this was in a viſion. And it is promiſed, that in heaven we ſhall ſee GOD, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him and full enjoyment; as to "ſee good days," is to enjoy them. Thoſe texts where it is ſaid, "No man can ſee GOD and live," Exod. xxxiii. 20. and John i. 18. "No man hath ſeen GOD at "any time," do not intimate that GOD is viſible, though we cannot ſee him; but ſeeing is metaphorically uſed for knowing, and the meaning is, that in this life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of GOD. A clear diſcovery of GOD to our underſtanding would let in joys into our ſouls, and create deſires in us too great for frail mortality to bear.

2. That he is "the living GOD." Spirit and life are often put together in scripture.

3. That GOD is immortal. This the scripture attributes to him, 1 Tim. i. 17. "To the king "immortal, invisible." 1 Tim. vi. 16. "Who only "hath immortality." This also flows from GOD's spirituality; a spiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish, or decay, or die. Now this doth so eminently agree to GOD, either because he is purely spiritual, and immaterial, as possibly no creature is; or else because he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, because he hath an original and independent immortality, and therefore the apostle doth attribute it to him in such a singular and peculiar manner; "Who only "hath immortality."

Secondly, practical inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of GOD as having a body, or any corporeal shape or members. This was the gross conceit of the Anthropomorphites of old, and of some Socinians of late, which they ground upon the gross and literal interpretation of many figurative speeches in scripture concerning GOD, as where it speaks of his face, and hand, and arm, &c. But we are very unthankful to GOD, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our capacities, if we abuse this condescension to the blemish and reproach of the divine nature. If GOD be pleased to stoop to our weakness, we must not therefore level him to our infirmities.

2. If GOD be a spirit, we are not to worship GOD by any image or sensible representation. Because "GOD is a spirit," we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent

him by "the likeness of any thing that is in heaven "above," that is, of any birds; "or in the earth "beneath," that is, of any beast; "or in the wa- "ters under the earth," that is, of any fish; as it is in the second commandment. For, as the prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken GOD to; Isa. xl. 18. "To whom will ye liken GOD? or "what likeness will ye compare to him?" We debase his spiritual and incorruptible nature, when we compare him to corruptible creatures; Rom. i. 22, 23. Speaking of the heathen idolatry, "Who pro- "fessing themselves wise, became fools, and chang- "ed the glory of the incorruptible GOD into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, "and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. "They became fools;" this is the folly of idolatry, to liken a spirit, which hath no bodily shape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that however some are pleased to mince the matter, I cannot see how the church of Rome, which worships GOD by or towards some image or sensible representation, can be excused from idolatry; and the church of England doth not without very just cause challenge the Romish church with it, and make it a ground of separation from her.

3. If "GOD be a spirit," then we should wor- "ship him in spirit and in truth." This is the inference of the text, and therefore I shall speak a little more largely of it; only I must explain what is meant by "worshipping in spirit and in truth," and shew you the force of this consequence, how it follows, that because "GOD is a spirit," therefore he must be "worshipped in spirit and in truth."

1. For the explication of it. This word spirit is sometimes applied to the doctrine of the gospel, and

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so it is opposed to letter, by which name the doctrine of Moses is called; 2 Cor. iii. 6. "Who hath "made us able ministers of the new testament, not "of the letter, but of the spirit;" not of the law which was written on tables of stone, but which CHRIST by his spirit writes in the hearts of believers. Sometimes to the worship of the gospel; and so it is opposed to the flesh, Gal. iii. 3. "Having be- "gun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the "flesh?" that is by the works of the ceremonial law, which is therefore called flesh, because the principal ceremony of it, circumcision, was made in the flesh, and because their sacrifices, a chief part of their worship, were of the flesh of beasts; and because the greatest part of their ordinances, as washing, and the like, related to the body. Hence it is the apostle calls the worship of the Jews, "the law of "a carnal commandment, Heb. vii. 16. and Heb. ix. 10. Carnal ordinances, speaking of the service of the law, "which," saith he, stood in meats, "and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordi- "nances." Now in opposition to this carnal and ceremonial worship, we are to "worship GOD in the "spirit." The worship of the Jews was most a bodily service; but we are to give GOD a reasonable service, to serve him with the "spirit of our minds," as the apostle speaks; instead of "offering the flesh "of bulls and goats," we are to "consecrate our- "selves" to the service of GOD: "this is a holy "and acceptable sacrifice," or "reasonable service."

"And in truth." Either in opposition to the false worship of the Samaritans (as in spirit is opposed to the worship of the Jews) as our SAVIOUR tells the woman, that "they worshipped they knew not "what;" or (which I rather think) in opposition to the

the shadows of the law; and so it is opposed, John i. 17. "The law was given by Moses: but grace "and truth came by JESUS CHRIST."

Not that the external service of GOD is here excluded, not that we are to shew no outward reverence to him: but that as under the law, the service of GOD was chiefly external and corporeal, so now it should chiefly be inward and spiritual; the worship of GOD under the gospel should chiefly be spiritual and substantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious devotion.

2dly. For the force of the consequence, it doth not lie in this, that just such as GOD is, such must our worship of him be; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worship; our worship of GOD must therefore be invisible, eternal, &c. for so is he; and besides, the will of GOD seems rather to be the rule of his worship, than his nature: but the force of it is this, GOD is of a spiritual nature, and this is to be supposed to be his will, that our worship should be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature who is to give it will bear; now saith CHRIST to the woman, the Jews and the Samaritans limit their worship to a certain place, and it consists chiefly in certain carnal rites and ordinances; but, saith he, though GOD hath permitted this for a time, because of the carnality and "hard-"ness of their hearts," yet the time is coming, when a more spiritual, and solid, and substantial worship of GOD is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular places and rites, not tied to the temple, or to such external ceremonies, but consisting in the devotion of our spirits, even the inward frame and temper of our hearts; all outward circumstances (excepting those of the two sacraments which are positive)

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poſitive) being left by the goſpel to as great a liberty, as natural neceſſity and decency will permit.

We muſt worſhip GOD, and therefore it is naturally neceſſary that we ſhould do it ſomewhere, in ſome place; now ſeeing ſomebody muſt determine this, it is moſt convenient that authority ſhould determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We muſt not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the worſhip of GOD; this authority ſhould reſtrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the goſpel hath left us free; and to this end, that the leſs we are tied to external obſervances, the more intent we ſhould be upon the ſpiritual and ſubſtantial parts of religion, the conforming of ourſelves to the mind and will of GOD, endeavouring to be like unto GOD, and to have our ſouls and ſpirits engaged in thoſe duties we perform to him. So that our SAVIOUR's argument is this; "GOD is a ſpirit," that is, "the moſt excellent "nature and being," and therefore muſt be ſerved with the beſt. We conſiſt of body and ſoul, it is true, and we muſt ſerve him with our whole man; but principally with our ſouls, which are the moſt excellent part of ourſelves; the ſervice of our mind and ſpirit is the beſt we can perform, and therefore moſt agreeable to GOD, who is a ſpirit, and the beſt and moſt perfect being.

So that the inference is this, that if "GOD be "a ſpirit, we muſt worſhip him in ſpirit, and in "truth;" our religion muſt be real, and inward, and ſincere, and ſubſtantial; we muſt not think to put off GOD with external obſervances, and with bodily reverence and attendance; this we muſt give him, but we muſt principally regard that our ſervice of him be reaſonable, that is, directed by our underſtandings,

standings, and accompanied with our affections. Our religion must consist principally in a sincere love and affection to GOD, which expresseth itself in a real conformity of our lives and actions to his will; and when we make our solemn approaches to him, in the duties of his worship and service, we must perform all acts of outward worship to GOD with a pure and sincere mind; whatever we do in the service of GOD, we must "do it heartily as to the LORD." GOD is a pure spirit, present to our spirits, intimate to our souls, and conscious to the most secret and retired motions of our hearts: now because we serve the searcher of hearts, we must serve him with our hearts. SERM. CLIII.

Indeed if we did worship GOD only to be seen of men, a pompous and external worship would be very suitable to such an end; but religion is not intended to please men, but GOD; and therefore it must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worship GOD with outward pomp and ceremony, than "in spirit and in truth," religion degenerates into superstition, and men embrace the shadow of religion, and let go the substance. And this the church of Rome hath done almost to the utter ruin of christianity; she hath clogged religion, and the worship of GOD, with so many rites and ceremonies, under one pretence or other, that the yoke of CHRIST is become heavier than that of Moses; and they have made the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law; and whatever Christians or churches are intent upon external rites and observances, to the neglect of the weightier parts of religion, regarding meats and drinks, &c. to the prejudice of righte-

ousness and peace, wherein the kingdom of GOD consists, they advance a religion as contrary to the nature of GOD, and as unsuitable to the genius and temper of the gospel as can be imagined.

It is an observation of Sir Edwin Sands, that as children are pleased with toys, so, saith he, it is a pitiful and childish spirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious religion. I deny not, but that very honest and devout men may be this way addicted; but the wiser any man is, the better he understands the nature of GOD and of religion, the farther he will be from this temper.

A religion that consists in external and little things, doth most easily gain upon and possess the weakest minds, and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their spirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent duties of christianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity; and if we let out much of it upon small things, there will be too little left for those parts of religion which are of greatest moment and concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of religion will insensibly cool and decline.

How should we blush, who are Christians, that we have not learnt this easy truth from the gospel, which even the light of nature taught the heathen; *Cultus autem deorum est optimus itemque sanctissimus atque castissimus, plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ & incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*, Tully. "The best, the surest, the most chaste, and most "devout worship of the gods, is that which is paid "them with a pure, sincere, and uncorrupt mind, "and words truly representing the thoughts of the "heart. "*Compositum jus fasque animi*, &c." "Serve GOD with a pure, honest, holy frame of "spirit,

" spirit, bring a heart that is but generously honest, " and he will accept of the plainest sacrifice."

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious worship of the Jews was never a thing in itself acceptable to GOD, or which he did delight in; and though GOD was pleased with their obedience to the ceremonial law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not desire it; but that which our SAVIOUR saith concerning the law of divorce, is true likewise of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the Jews " for the hardness of their hearts," and for their proneness to idolatry. GOD did not command it so much by way of approbation, as by way of condescension to their weakness; it was because of " the hardness " of their carnal hearts" that GOD brought them under " the law of a carnal commandment," as the apostle calls it. See Psal. li. 16, 17. Jer. vii. 21.

The reason why I have insisted so long upon this is, to let you understand what is the true nature of CHRIST'S religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in religion. The sacrifices and rites of the Jews were very unagreeable and unsuitable to the nature of GOD, Psal. l. 13. " will I " eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unsuitable way of service to kill oxen and sheep for GOD; and there is the same reason for all other rites, which either natural necessity or decency doth not require. Can any man in earnest think, that GOD, who is a spirit, is pleased with the pompous bravery and pageantry which affects our senses? So little doth GOD value indifferent rites, that even the necessary external service of GOD, and outward reverence, where they are separated from " spirit and truth," from

real holineſs and obedience to the indiſpenſable laws of CHRIST, are ſo far from being acceptable to GOD, that they are abominable; nay, if they be uſed for a cloak of ſin, or in oppoſition to real religion, and with a deſign to undermine it, GOD accounts ſuch ſervice in the number of the moſt heinous ſins.

You, who ſpend the ſtrength and vigour of your ſpirits about external things, whoſe zeal for or againſt ceremonies is ready to eat you up; you, who hate and perſecute one another becauſe of theſe things, and break the neceſſary and indiſpenſable commands of love, as an indifferent and unneceſſary ceremony, "go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, "and not ſacrifice," which our SAVIOUR doth ſo often inculcate, and that Rom. xiv. 17. "The "kingdom of GOD is not meat and drink, &c." And ſtudy the meaning of this, "GOD is a ſpirit, "and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth."

SERMON CLIV.

The immenſity of the divine nature.

PSAL. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit? or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand ſhall hold me.

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THAT attribute of GOD which I laſt diſcourſed of is moſt abſolute, and declares his eſſence moſt immediately; "the ſpirituality of the di-

" vine nature." I shall in the next place speak of those which relate to the manner of his being, immensity and eternity, that is, the infiniteness of his essence, both in respect of space and duration; that the divine nature hath no limits of it's being, nor bounds of it's duration. I shall at the present speak to the first of these, his immensity, and that from these words which I here read to you, " Whither " shall I go from thy spirit, &c." The meaning of which is this, that GOD is a spirit, infinitely diffusing himself, present in all places, so that wherever I go, GOD is there; we cannot flee from his presence. " If " I ascend into heaven, he is there; if I go down " into the grave," the place of silence and obscurity, " he is there;" (for that is the meaning of the expression) " if I make my bed in hell, if I take the " wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost " parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead " me, and thy right hand shall hold me;" that is, if my motion should be as swift as that of the light, which when the sun riseth darts itself in an instant from one part of the world to another, over the earth and the sea, the remotest parts of the world which are unknown to us, yet would GOD be present to me in the motion, and all along as I go must I be led and upholden by him; so that all these expressions do but signify to us the immensity of GOD's essence, that his being is infinitely diffused and present in all places. SERM. CLIV.

In speaking to this attribute of GOD's immensity, I shall first explain it to you a little.

Secondly, prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, answer an objection or two that may be made against it.

Fourthly, draw some doctrinal inferences from it.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, make some use and improvement of it.

First, for the explication of it. By the immensity of GOD, I mean, that his being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way spread and diffuse itself beyond what we can imagine; so that you cannot define the presence of GOD by any certain place; so as to say, here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, so as to say, thus far his being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where present after a most infinite manner, in the darkest corners and most private recesses; the most secret closet that is in the whole world, the heart of man, darkness and privacy cannot keep him out; the presence of another being, even of a body, which is the grossest substance, doth not exclude him; the whole world doth not confine him; but he fills all the space which we can imagine beyond this visible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, for the proof of it, I shall attempt it,

I. From the natural notions, and dictates of our minds.

II. From scripture and divine revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

1. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds. We find that the heathen, by the light of nature, did attribute this perfection to GOD. Tully tells us, De Nat. deor. that Pythagoras thought, *Deum esse animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum & commeantem*, "That GOD is as it were a soul "passing through and inspiring all nature." And in l. 2. de leg. that this was Thales his opinion which he commends, *Homines existimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia esse plena*, "That "men ought to believe, that the gods see all things, "that all things are full of them." So Sen. epist.

95. *Ubique & omnibus præsto est.* "He is every "where present and at hand," & de Benef. l. 4. *Quocunque te flexeris, ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus suum ipse implet*; "Which way soever thou turnest thyself, thou shalt "find him meeting thee, nothing is without him, "he fills his own work." Not much differing from the expression of the Psalmist here.

II. From scripture and divine revelation. I shall instance in some remarkable places; 1 Kings viii. 27. "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of hea-"vens cannot contain thee." Job xi. 7, 8, 9. "Canst thou by searching find out GOD? canst "thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Isa. lxvi. 1. "Thus saith the LORD, behold, hea-"ven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-stool: "where is the house that ye build unto me? and "where is the place of my rest?" Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. "Am I a GOD at hand, saith the LORD, and "not a GOD afar off? Can any hide himself in se-"cret places that I shall not see him, saith the LORD? "do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the LORD?" Amos ix. 2, 3. "Though they dig into hell, thence "shall mine hand take them; though they climb "up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. "And though they hide themselves in the top of "Carmel, I will search and take them out thence: "and though they be hid from my sight in the bot-"tom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent "and he shall bite them." Acts xvii. 27, 28. "Though he be not far from every one of us. For "in him we live, and move, and have our being; "as certain also of your own poets have said, for "we are also his off-spring."

III. From

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III. From the inconveniencies of the contrary. And this is the moſt proper way of proving any of God's perfections; for as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cauſe of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of demonſtration, but of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. The firſt and moſt eaſy notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being that hath all perfection, and is free from all imperfections; now if I prove that the immenſity of God's eſſence is a perfection, or which is the ſame, that the contrary is an imperfection, I do ſufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to ſuppoſe the divine eſſence to be limited, or confined, and his preſence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this neceſſary perfection of God, his univerſal providence; and the neceſſary duty of creatures, to worſhip and truſt in him; and the voluntary manifeſtation and appearance of God, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

1. It contradicts the univerſal providence of God. The univerſal providence of God ſuppoſeth many perfections, viz. infinite knowledge, and infinite power, his omniſcience and omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without omnipreſence. We find that all finite beings have a finite knowledge, and a finite power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite underſtanding and power can be founded any where elſe, than in an infinite eſſence. To have an infinite knowledge of all things, even thoſe things which are moſt ſecret and hidden, to be able to do all things, to ſteer and govern the actions of all creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, ſeems to all the reaſon of mankind to require immediate preſence.

2. It

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2. It contradicts the necessary duty of the creature, which is to worship GOD, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all worship of GOD is rendered vain, or at least uncertain, if GOD be not present to us to hear our prayers, to take notice of our wants, and receive our acknowledgments: it will much abate our confidence in GOD, and our fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be present to us or not, whether he sees our actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary manifestation and appearance of GOD in the incarnation of CHRIST. He that supposeth GOD not to be every where present by his essence, must in all reason confine his presence to heaven, and suppose him to be present elsewhere only by his vertue and power: but if this were so, how could the divinity be essentially united to the human nature of CHRIST, which was here upon earth? How "is GOD with us;" how does "he "pitch his tabernacle amongst men;" if his essential presence be confined to heaven?

Thirdly, I come to answer objections against this doctrine.

There are two objections against this.

1. From reason.

2. From scripture.

1. Obj. Reason will be ready to suggest, that this is a disparagement to the divine nature, to tie his presence to this vile dunghil of the earth, and sordid sink of hell. This is a gross apprehension of GOD, and a measuring of him by ourselves. Indeed if we look upon GOD as capable of injury, and suffering, and offence, from the contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed there were some strength in this objection: but he is a blessed and pure being,

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being, *Mens segregata ab omni concretione mortali*, "A mind free from all mortal composition or mixture;" Tully. Μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, "disentangled from every thing passible;" as Plut. Those things that are nauseous to our senses, do not affect him: darkness is uncomfortable to us, but "the darkness and the light are all one to him." Wickedness may "hurt a man," or "the son of "man;" but "if we multiply our transgressions, "we do nothing to GOD," as Elihu speaks, Job xxxv. 6. Nothing can disquiet or discompose his happy and blessed nature, but he converseth here in this dark and troubled world with less danger or disturbance, or any impure contagion, than the sunbeams.

2. Object. Does not the scripture tell us, that "GOD sits in the heavens, and "dwells on high," that "heaven is his throne," and that "it is the city "of the great GOD?" Doth not the LORD's prayer teach us to say, "Our father which art in heaven?" Is he not said to "look down from heaven," and "to hear in heaven his dwelling-place?" Is it not said, that "he doth not dwell in temples made with "hands?" And does not Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 27. put it as a strange question, "will GOD indeed "dwell on the earth?" Is he not said to come down and draw near to us, and to be afar off from us? Now how does this agree with immensity and omnipresence?

For answer to this, I must distinguish the presence of GOD. There is, 1st, his glorious presence, that is, such a presence of GOD as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifestation of his glory, and that is especially and chiefly confined to heaven, in respect of which it is called his seat, and throne,

and

and "the habitation of his glory." Some degree of this was in the temple, which is the reaſon of Solomon's admiration, "will GOD indeed dwell on "earth?" SERM. CLIV.

2dly, There is his gracious preſence, which diſcovers itſelf by miraculous effects of his favour, and goodneſs, and aſſiſtance, and thereby he is ſaid to "dwell in the hearts" of good men, and "with "them that are of an humble and contrite ſpirit," Iſa. lvii. 15. and in reſpect of this he is ſaid to "draw near to us," to "look down upon us;" and in reſpect of the abſence of this to be "far from "us."

3dly, There is his eſſential preſence, which is equally and alike in all places; and this is not excluded by thoſe former expreſſions which the ſcripture uſeth to denote to us the glorious and gracious preſence of GOD.

Fourthly, to make ſome inferences. I will mention only ſuch as the ſcripture here takes notice of, ſpeaking of GOD's immenſity.

I. Inf. That GOD is a ſpirit. This neceſſarily flows from his immenſity; for if the eſſence of GOD be every where diffuſed, the divine nature muſt be ſpiritual, otherwiſe it could not be in the ſame place where body and matter is, but muſt be ſhut out of the world. But this I ſpoke more largely to, in my diſcourſe of GOD's being a ſpirit. This the Pſalmiſt obſerves here, "Where ſhall I go from thy ſpirit?" If he were not a ſpirit, we might "go from him," and "hide ourſelves from his preſence."

II. Inf. That GOD is incomprehenſible, that which is infinite cannot be meaſured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this alſo the Pſalmiſt takes notice of, in the verſe before my text, "Such

" knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I " cannot attain it."

III. Inf. That GOD is omniscient, if GOD be every where, then he knows all things, yea even the hidden things of darkness, the secrets of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from an infinite eye; he is present to our thoughts, intimate to our hearts and reins; this the Psalmist takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12 verses.

IV. Inf. That GOD is omnipotent. " He can do " all things." Distance limits the power of creatures, and makes " their hands short;" but GOD is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this also the Psalmist intimates in the text, v. 10. " Even " there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand " hold me."

Fifthly, the use and improvement I shall make of this, shall be,

1. To awaken our fear of him.

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him.

1. To awaken our fear of him. The consideration of GOD's presence should awaken in us a fear of reverence. The presence of an earthly majesty will awe our spirits, and compose us to reverence; yea the presence of a wise and good man; how much more should the presence of the great, glorious, the wise, and the holy, and the just GOD strike an awe upon our spirits? Where-ever we are GOD is with us, we always converse with him, and live continually in his presence; now a heathen could say, *cum Diis verecundè agendum*, " We must behave ourselves " modestly because we are in the presence of GOD."

And it should awaken in us a fear to offend GOD, and a fear of the divine displeasure for having offended him. Fear is the most wakeful passion in the soul of man, and is the first principle that is wrought upon

upon in us from the apprehensions of a deity; it flows immediately from the principle of self-preservation which GOD hath planted in every man's nature; we have a natural dread and horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our being or happiness; now the greatest danger is from the greatest power, for where we are clearly over-matched, we cannot hope to make opposition nor resistance with security and success, to rebel with safety: now he that apprehends GOD to be near him, and present to him, believes such a being to stand by him as is possest of an infinite and irresistible power, and will vindicate all contempt of the divine majesty, and violation of his laws. If we believe GOD to be always present with us, "Fear will continually take "hold of us," and we shall say of every place, as Jacob did of Bethel, "Surely GOD is in this place, "how dreadful is this place?" When we have at any time provoked GOD, if we believe the just GOD is at hand to revenge himself, and if we believe "the power of his anger," we shall say with David, Psal. lxxvi. 7. "Thou even thou art to be feared, "and who may stand before thee when thou art "angry?" Psal. cxix. 120. "My flesh trembleth "because of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments."

Sinners consider this, "It is a fearful thing to "fall into the hands of the living GOD," and every time you sin, you are within his reach. Let then the consideration of GOD's presence deter us from sin, and quicken us to our duty. The eye and presence of a superior will lay a great restraint upon men; the eye of our prince, our master, or our father, will make us afraid or ashamed to do any thing that is foolish or unseemly: And will we do that under the eye of GOD, which we should blush

to do before a grave or wise person, yea before a child or a fool? Did but men live under this apprehension, that God is present to them, that an holy and all-seeing eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute God's glorious name, by a trifling use of it in customary swearing and cursing. Whenever you sin, you affront God to his face; and provoke omnipotent justice, which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the consideration of this should especially deter us from secret sins. This is the use the Psalmist here makes of it. If we believe that "God searcheth "us and knows us, that he knows our down-sitting, "and our up-rising, and understands our thoughts "afar off, that he compasseth our path, and our "lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways, "that there is not a word in our tongue, but he "knows it altogether, that he hath beset us behind "and before, that the darkness hideth not from him, "but the night shineth as the day, and the dark-"ness and light are both alike;" I say, if we believe this, how should we live in an awful sense of the majesty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inseparable from us, as we are from ourselves, whose eye is upon us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our days! did men believe that God is always with them, that his eye pierceth the darkness, and sees through all those clouds with which they hide and muffle themselves, and pries into the most secret recesses of their hearts, how would this check and restrain them from "devising mischief in their hearts, "or in their bed-chamber?" The holy presence, and the pure eye of God would be to us a thousand

times more than to have our father, or our master, or our prince, or him whom we most revere, to stand by us. Did but men *representare sibi Deum*, "make "GOD present to them," by living under a continual sense of his presence, they would, as the expression of the wise man is, "be in the fear of the LORD all "day." *Magna spes peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adsistat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus authoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius facit*; "The main hope of sinners is to remain un-"discovered, let but somebody be privy to their "designs, and they are utterly disappointed; it is "fit for the mind of a man to have an awe of some "being, whose authority may render even it's pri-"vacy more solemn." This is the character of wicked men, Psal. lxxxvi. 14. "that they have not "GOD before their eyes." One great cause of all the wickedness, and violence, and looseness that is upon the earth, is, they do not believe that GOD is near them, and stands by them.

And as the consideration of GOD's presence should deter us from sin, so it should quicken and animate us to our duty. It is ordinarily a great encouragement to men to acquit themselves handsomly, to have the eyes of men upon them, especially of those whose applause and approbation they value. GOD alone is *amplum theatrum*, he is a greater theatre than the world, and it should be more to us that he stands by us, than if the eyes of all the world were fixed upon us. Seneca adviseth it as an excellent means to promote virtue, to propound to ourselves, and set before our eyes some eminently virtuous person, as Cato or Lælius, *ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo videnti faciamus:* "That we "may live just as if he were looking upon us, and

"do

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" do all things just as if he beheld us." How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that GOD looks upon us, and sees us, and really stands by us, than faintly to imagine the presence of Lælius or Cato?

This should have an influence upon all the duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who stands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. This Cic. in l. 2. de leg. looks upon as a great principle of religion, *sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, & qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, quâ mente, quâ pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere:* " Let men be thoroughly persuaded of this, " that the gods observe, both the disposition and " the actions of every particular man, what he con- " sents to, what he allows himself in, particularly " with what meaning, with what degree of inward " devotion he performs his religious worship; and " that they distinguish between the pious and the " impious."

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him. When we are in straits, and difficulties, and dangers, GOD is with us; when trouble is near to us, GOD is not far from us; where-ever we are, how remote soever from friends and companions, we cannot be banished from GOD's presence; if we dwell " be- " yond the utmost parts of the sea, there his hand " leads us, and his right-hand holds us. Psal. xvi. " 8. I have set the LORD always before me; be- " cause he is at my right-hand, I shall not be mov- " ed." The consideration of GOD's presence is the great stay and support of our faith, Psal. xlvi. 1, 2. " GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present

" help

" help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though " the earth be removed, and though the mountains " be carried into the midſt of the ſea." In the greateſt commotions, and the moſt eminent and threatening dangers, this ſhould charm and allay our fears, that " GOD is a preſent help."

This was the ſupport of Moſes his faith in his ſufferings, as the apoſtle tells us, Heb. xi. 27. " He " endured, as ſeeing him who is inviſible."

To conclude all, whenever we are under any preſſure or trouble, we ſhould rebuke our own fears, and challenge our anxious thoughts, with David, Pſal. xlii. 11. " Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? " and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? truſt " ſtill in GOD;" believe that GOD is with thee, and that omnipotent goodneſs ſtands by thee, who can and will ſupport thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee when it ſeems beſt to his wiſdom.

SERMON CLV.

The eternity of GOD.

PSAL. xc. 2.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world, even from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art GOD.

THE immenſity and eternity of GOD are thoſe attributes which relate to his nature, or manner of being. Having ſpoken of the former, I proceed to conſider the latter, from theſe words. SERM. CLV.

The title of this Pſalm is the " prayer of Moſes,

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" the man of GOD." He begins his prayer with the acknowledgment of GOD's providence to his people from the beginning of the world; LORD, thou " haſt been our dwelling place from all generations; " in generation and generation;" ſo the Hebrew. He was well acquainted with the hiſtory of the world, and the providence of GOD from the beginning of it, and as if he had ſpoken too little of GOD, in ſaying, that his providence had been exerciſed in all the ages of the world, he tells us here in the text, that he was before the world, and he made it, he was from all eternity, and ſhould continue to all eternity the ſame. " Before the mountains were brought " forth;" the moſt firm and durable parts of the world; the moſt eminent and conſpicuous; " or " ever thou had'ſt formed the earth and the world;" before any thing was created; " from everlaſting to " everlaſting thou art GOD." In ſpeaking of this attribute, I ſhall

Firſt, give you the explication of it.

Secondly, endeavour to prove that it doth belong to GOD, and ought to be attributed to the divine nature.

Thirdly, Draw ſome corollaries from the whole.

Firſt, For the explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: now there are two limits of duration, beginning and ending; that which hath always been is without beginning; that which always ſhall be is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of it's being now to ceaſe, though there be no ſuch thing in the world: and there are ſome things which have had a beginning of their being, but ſhall have no end, ſhall always continue, as the angels, and ſpirits of men. The firſt of theſe the

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ſchoolmen call eternity *à parte ante*, that is, duration without beginning; this latter eternity *à parte poſt*, a duration without ending: But eternity abſolutely taken comprehends both theſe, and ſignifies an infinite duration which had no beginning, nor ſhall have any end; ſo that when we ſay GOD is eternal, we mean, that he always was and ſhall be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor ſhall have any end of days; but that, "he is from everlaſting to "everlaſting," as it is here in the text.

It is true indeed, that as to GOD's eternity *a parte ante*, as to his having always been, the ſcripture doth not give us any ſolicitous account of it; it only tells us in general, that GOD was "before the world "was," and that "he created it;" it doth not deſcend to gratify our curioſity, in giving us any account of what GOD did before he made the world, or how he entertained himſelf from all eternity; it doth not give us any diſtinct account of his infinite duration; for that had been impoſſible for our finite underſtandings to comprehend; if we ſhould have aſcended upward millions of ages, yet we ſhould never have aſcended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the ſcripture, which was wrote to inſtruct us in what was neceſſary, and not to ſatisfy our curioſity, tells us this, that GOD was "from everlaſting, before the "world was made, and that he laid the foundations "of it."

So that by the eternity of GOD you are to underſtand "the perpetual continuance of his being, "without beginning or ending."

I ſhall not trouble you with the inconſiſtent and unintelligible notions of the ſchoolmen; that it is *duratio tota ſimul*, in which we are not to conceive

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any succeſſion, but to imagine it an inſtant. We may as well conceive the immenſity of GOD to be a point, as his eternity to be an inſtant; and as according to our manner of conceiving, we muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe the immenſity of GOD to be an infinite expanſion of his eſſence, a preſence of it to all places, and imaginable ſpace; ſo muſt we ſuppoſe the eternity of GOD to be a perpetual continuance, co-exiſtent to all imaginable ſucceſſion of ages. Now how can that be together, which muſt neceſſarily be imagined to be co-exiſtent to ſucceſſions, let them that can conceive.

Secondly, For the proof of this, I ſhall attempt it two ways.

I. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural reaſon. This attribute of GOD is of all other leaſt diſputed among the philoſophers; indeed all agree that GOD is a perfect and happy being, but wherein that happineſs and perfection conſiſts, they differ exceedingly; but all agree that GOD is eternal, and are agreed what eternity is, viz. "a boundleſs duration:" and however they did attribute a beginning to their heroes and demons, whence come the genealogies of their gods; yet the ſupreme GOD, they looked upon as without beginning; and it is a good evidence, that this perfection doth clearly belong to GOD, that Epicurus, who had the loweſt and meaneſt conceptions of GOD, and robbed him of as many perfections, as his imperfect reaſon would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him. Tully de Nat. Deor. lib. 1. ſaith to the Epicureans, *ubi igitur veſtrum beatum & æternum quibus duobus verbis ſignificatis Deum?* "where then is your happy and eternal being, by

"which

" which two epithets you expreſs GOD?" And Lucretius, who hath undertaken to repreſent to the world the doctrine of Epicurus, gives this account of the divine nature. SERM. CLV.

Omnis enim per ſe divûm natura neceſſe eſt,
Immortali ævo ſumma cum pace fruatur.

" It is abſolutely neceſſary to the nature of the gods, " to paſs an eternity in profound peace and quiet."

The poets who had the wildeſt notions of GOD, yet they conſtantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι; the heathen never mention the name of GOD, without this attribute, *dii immortales!* immortal gods! was their ordinary exclamation; and they ſwear conſtantly by this attribute, *deos teſtor immortales*; and to mention no more, Tully ſaith expreſly, *Nos Deum niſi ſempiternum intelligere qui poſſumus?* " How can we conceive of GOD, but as an eternal " being?"

Now the reaſon of this is evident, becauſe it would be the greateſt imperfection we could attribute to his being; and the more perfect his being were otherwiſe, the greater imperfection would it be for ſuch a being to die; ſo excellent a nature to ceaſe to be; it would be an infinite abaſement to all his other perfections; his power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, that theſe ſhould all be periſhing. Nay it would hinder ſeveral of his perfections, and contradict their very being: his ſelf-exiſtence; had he not always been, he had not been of himſelf; his neceſſary exiſtence; for that is not neceſſarily, which may at any time not be, or ceaſe to be what it is; and it would much abate the duty of the creature; we could not have that aſſurance of his promiſe, and that ſecurity of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being,

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being, who should be the dispenser of them, were uncertain.

Now these absurdities and inconveniencies following from the denial of this perfection to GOD, is sufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the perfections of GOD cannot be proved by way of demonstration, but only by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary.

II. From scripture and divine revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpose which speak of the eternity of GOD directly, and by consequence: by consequence those words, 2 Pet. iii. 8. "One "day with the LORD is as a thousand years, and "a thousand years as one day;" which words, however interpreters have troubled themselves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, that such is the infinite duration of GOD, that all measures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by this xcth Psalm, out of which they are cited, "for a thousand years in thy sight "are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a "watch in the night," that is as the time past, as a few hours slept away, for that is the meaning of "a watch in the night," that is as nothing; now St. Peter's conversion of the words, "one day is "as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one "day" only signifies this, that the longest duration of time is so inconsiderable to GOD, that it is as the shortest, that is, bears no proportion to the eternity of GOD.

But directly, the scripture frequently mentions this attribute, he is called the "everlasting GOD," Gen. xxi. 33. "The eternal GOD," Deut. xxxiii. 27. and which is to the same purpose, "he that "inhabiteth

" inhabiteth eternity," Isa. lvii. 15. And this as it is attributed to him in respect of his being, so in respect of all his other perfections, Psal. ciii. 17. " The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to " everlasting. Rom. i. 20." " his eternal power." 1 Tim. i. 17. " The king eternal." Those doxologies which the scripture useth are but acknowledgments of this attribute. " Blessed be the LORD " for ever and ever," Neh. ix. 5. " To whom be " glory, and honour, and dominion, for ever and " ever, Gal. i. 5. and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all those places which speak of him as without beginning, Psal. xciii. 2. " Thou " art from everlasting." Mich. v. 2. " Whose go- " ings forth have been from everlasting." Hab. i. 12. " Art not thou from everlasting! O LORD!" And those which speak of the perpetual continuance of his duration; Psal. cii. 24, 25, 26, 27. " Thy " years are throughout all generations, of old thou " hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the " heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall " perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them " shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture " shalt thou change them, and they shall be chang- " ed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall " have no end."

And those which speak of him as the first and the last; Isa. xliii. 10. " Before me there was no " GOD formed, neither shall there be any after me. " I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me " there is no GOD." And to mention no more, those which speak of his being, as co-existent to all difference of time, past, present, and to come, Rev. i. 8. " I am alpha, and omega, the beginning, and " the ending, saith the LORD, which is, and which " was, and which is to come." Thirdly,

Thirdly, I shall from hence draw,

I. Some doctrinal corollaries.

II. Some practical inferences.

I. Doctrinal corollaries, that you may see how the perfections of GOD depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1. Corol. From the eternity of GOD we may infer that he is of himself. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cause of it's being.

2. Corol. We may hence infer the necessity of his being. It is necessary every thing should be, when it is; now that which is always is absolutely necessary, because always so.

3. Corol. The immutability of the divine nature; for being always, he is necessarily, and being necessarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his being is as impossible as a cessation. Therefore the Psalmist puts his immutability and eternity together. Psal. cii. 27. "But thou art the same, and thy "years shall have no end."

II. By way of practical inference or application.

1. The consideration of GOD's eternity may serve for the support of our faith. This Moses here useth as a ground of his faith; "LORD, thou hast been "our dwelling-place, in all generations, before the "mountains were brought forth, &c." Psal. lxii. 8. "Trust in him at all times, ye people." His immensity is an argument why all should trust in him, he is a present help to all; and why they should trust in him at all times, his eternity is an argument, Deut. xxxiii. 27. "The eternal GOD "is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting "arms." There are two attributes which are the proper objects of our faith and confidence, GOD's goodness, and his power, both these are eternal;

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"The goodneſs of the LORD endureth for ever," as it is frequently in the Pſalms: and his power is eternal; the apoſtle ſpeaks of his eternal power, as well as godhead; Rom. i. 20. Iſa. xxvi. 4. "Truſt ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD "Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength." Iſa. xl. 28. "The everlaſting GOD, the LORD, the Creator of "the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is "weary."

We cannot truſt in men, becauſe there is nothing in man to be a foundation of our confidence; his good will towards us may change, his power may faint, and he may grow weary; or if theſe continue, yet they that have a mind and a power to help us, themſelves may fail; therefore the Pſalmiſt uſeth this conſideration of mens mortality, to take us off from confidence in man, Pſal. cxlvi. 3, 4. "Put not your truſt in princes, nor in the ſon of "man, in whom there is no help; his breath go-"eth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very "day his thoughts periſh." Iſa. ii. 22. "Ceaſe ye "from man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils; for "wherein is he to be accounted of?" The greateſt of the ſons of men are but "lying refuges to the "everlaſting GOD;" they are but "broken reeds "to the rock of ages."

And this may ſupport our faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our poſterity, and the condition of GOD's church to the end of the world. When we die we may leave ours and the church in his hands, who lives for ever, and reigns for ever. The enemies of GOD's church, and thoſe who have the moſt malicious deſigns againſt it, whatever ſhare they may have in the affairs of the world, they can but do-

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mineer for a while, they must "die, and that very "day their thoughts perish: but thy throne, O "GOD, is for ever and ever."

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We serve the GOD who can give us an everlasting reward. The reward of the next life is called "eternal life, "an eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. "Eternal salvation," Heb. v. 9. "An eternal in-"heritance," Heb. ix. 15. That place where good men shall be rewarded is called, "Everlasting habi-"tations," Luke xvi. 9. "A house eternal in the "heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. As the promise of our future reward is founded in the goodness of GOD, and the greatness of it in his power, so the duration of it in his eternity. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we serve him and suffer for him who lives for ever, and will make us happy for ever? When we serve the great men of this world, though we be secure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this discourageth many, and makes men worship the rising sun, and many times takes off mens eyes from the king, to his successor: but he that serves GOD, serves "the king everlasting," as the apostle calls him, who will live to dispense rewards to all those who are faithful to him.

3. For the terror of wicked men. The sentence which shall be past upon men at the day of judgment, is called "Eternal judgment," Heb. vi. 2. because it decides mens eternal state; the punishment that shall follow this sentence, which shall pass upon the wicked, is called, "Everlasting punishment," Matth. xxv. 36. "Everlasting fire," Matth. xxv. 41. "Everlasting destruction," 2 Thess. ii. 9. "The vengeance of eternal fire," Jude 7. "The "smoke

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" ſmoke of the bottomleſs pit," is ſaid, " to a-
" ſcend for ever and ever," Rev. xiv. 11. and the wicked " to be tormented day and night, for ever " and ever, Rev. xx. 10. Now as the puniſhment of wicked men is founded in the juſtice of GOD; and the greatneſs of it in his power; ſo the perpetuity and continuance of it in his eternity. The apoſtle ſaith, Heb. x. 31. " It is a fearful thing to " fall into the hands of the living GOD;" becauſe he that " lives for ever can puniſh for ever;" as the eternal demerit of ſin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive the never dying worm, ſo the wrath of the eternal GOD blows up the eternal flame.

How ſhould this awaken in us a fear of the eternal GOD! Sinners, what a folly is it, for " the " pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon," to incenſe that juſtice which will puniſh and torment you for ever! As good men ſhall have the everlaſting GOD for their reward, and their happineſs; ſo wicked men ſhall have him for their judge and avenger.

We fear the wrath of men, whoſe power is ſhort, and " whoſe breath is in their noſtrils," who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Doſt thou fear " man that ſhall die, and the ſon of man that " ſhall be made as graſs?" and is not the wrath of the eternal GOD much more terrible? Luke xii. 4, 5. And I ſay unto you, my friends, be not afraid " of them that kill the body, and after that have " no more that they can do: but I will forewarn " you whom ye ſhall fear; fear him, who after he " hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell, yea, I " ſay unto you, fear him." The wrath of man is deſpicable, becauſe it hath bounds and limits; the fury of man can but reach to the body, it can go

no farther; it expires with this life; it cannot follow us beyond the grave: but the wrath of the eternal GOD doth not only reach the body, but the ſoul; it is not confined to this life, but purſues us to the other world, and extends itſelf to all eternity.

"Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath pow-
"er to caſt into hell," that is, to inflict eternal torments; "yea, I ſay unto you, fear him."

SERMON CLVI.

The incomprehenſibleneſs of GOD.

JOB xi. 7.

Canſt thou by ſearching find out GOD? *Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

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IN treating of the properties and perfections of GOD, I ſhall at preſent conſider that which reſults from the infinite excellency of his nature and perfection, compared with the imperfection of our underſtandings, which is commonly called, the incomprehenſibleneſs of GOD. This you have expreſſed here in the words of Zophar, "Canſt thou
"by ſearching find out GOD?" &c.

There is no great difficulty in the words; "Canſt
"thou by ſearching find out GOD," *poteſne perveſtigare intima Dei*, ſo Caſtalio tranſlates it; doſt thou know GOD intimately, and thoroughly within and without? Canſt thou pierce into the centre of his perfections,

perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? And, "Canſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" Canſt thou find out the Almighty, *uſque ad ultima*, to the very laſt and utmoſt of him? ſo as thou canſt ſay after a thorough ſearch and enquiry, there is no perfection in GOD beyond this, there is nothing of him now that remains to be known; this he is, and no other; that he is, and no otherwiſe; this he can do, and no more; hither doth his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom reach, and no farther. SERM. CLVI.

"Canſt thou do this?" Theſe interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had ſaid, "No, thou canſt not; GOD is unſearchable, he is "incomprehenſible."

The two queſtions in the text ſeem to be only two ſeveral expreſſions of the ſame thing. The firſt queſtion is undoubtedly general, concerning the nature and perfections of GOD in general; "Canſt "thou by ſearching find out GOD?" Canſt thou by the moſt diligent ſearch and enquiry come to a perfect knowledge and underſtanding of him?

The ſecond queſtion may ſeem to be a particular inſtance to the general truth implied in the firſt queſtion; he ſeems to inſtance in his power; as if he had ſaid, "GOD is unſearchable," and then had inſtanced in a particular perfection, "the power of "GOD, canſt thou by ſearching find out GOD?" Thou canſt not comprehend the divine nature and perfections in general; "Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection;" Conſider particularly his power, and ſee if thou canſt know the utmoſt of that. But I rather think, that the latter queſtion is altogether the ſame in ſenſe with the former; and that the attribute of Almighty, which is here given to GOD, is uſed by way of deſcription, and not intended

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tended by way of inſtance. "Canſt thou find out "the Almighty," that is, GOD, "unto perfection?" Which way ſoever we take the words, it is not much material; we may ground this obſervation upon them:

That GOD is incomprehenſible.

This term or attribute is a relative term, and ſpeaks a relation between an object and a faculty, between God and a created underſtanding; ſo that the meaning of it is plainly this, that no created underſtanding can comprehend GOD, that is, have a perfect and exact knowledge of him, ſuch a knowledge as is adequate to the perfection of the object. Or thus, the nature and perfections of GOD are above the underſtanding of any of his creatures; it is only his own infinite underſtanding that can frame a perfect idea of his own perfection. GOD knows himſelf, his own underſtanding comprehends his own perfections: but he is "incomprehenſible to his creatures."

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than GOD; for "he is not far from every one of us, in him we "live, and move, and have our being;" there needs no great ſearch to find out there is a GOD; "an eternal power and deity are clearly ſeen in the "things which are made," as the apoſtle tells us; but the manner of the being, and properties, and perfections of this GOD, theſe cannot be comprehended by a finite underſtanding. I ſhall prove the doctrine, and then apply it.

Firſt, For the proof it. I will attempt it theſe three ways.

I. By way of inſtance, or induction of particulars.

II. By way of conviction.

III. By giving the clear reaſon of it.

I. By way of inſtance. And I ſhall give you inſtances

ſtances both on the part of the object, and of the ſubject; or the perſons who are capable of knowing GOD in any degree. SERM. CLVI.

1. On the part of the object. The nature of GOD, the excellency and perfection of GOD, the works and ways of GOD are above our thoughts and apprehenſions. The nature of GOD; it is vaſt and infinite, Job xxxvi. 26. "GOD is great, and we know him "not." Job xxxvii. 23. "Touching the Almigh- "ty, we cannot find him out." Pſal. cxlv. 3. "His "greatneſs is unſearchable."

The excellencies and perfections of GOD; his immenſity, 2 Chron. ii. 6. "The heaven of heavens "cannot contain him:" The eternity of his duration, "from everlaſting to everlaſting he is GOD." We cannot imagine any limits of his preſence, nor bounds of his duration: the infiniteneſs of his knowledge, Pſal. cxlvii. 5. "His underſtanding is infi- "nite." When we think of the wiſdom and knowledge of GOD, our beſt way is to fall into admiration, Rom. xi. 35. "O the depth of the riches both "of the wiſdom and knowledge of GOD!"

Whereas the ſcripture ſpeaks of thoſe perfections of GOD, which the creatures do in ſome meaſure and degree partake of, as his goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom, and holineſs, and immortality, it attributes them in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner to GOD, as doth exclude and ſhut out the creature from any claim or ſhare or title to them, Matt. xix. 16, 17. "Why calleſt thou me good; there is none good "but one, that is GOD." 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the bleſſed and only potentate, who only "hath immortality." 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only "wiſe GOD," Rev. xv. 4. "For thou only art "holy." In ſo inconceiveable a manner doth GOD

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poſſeſs theſe perfections which he communicates, and we can only underſtand them as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſes them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine perfections, we muſt not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature, nor muſt we limit them by what they are in the creature, but ſay, the goodneſs and the wiſdom of GOD are all this which is in the creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend; the tranſcendent degree, and the ſingularity of theſe divine perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The works of GOD, they are likewiſe unſearchable; the works of creation and of redemption. Job v. 9. "Which doth great things, and un-"ſearchable, marvellous things, paſt finding out:" and then he inſtanceth in the works of GOD, Job xxvi. 14. "Lo, theſe are part of his ways: But "how little a portion is heard of him? and the "thunder of his voice who can underſtand?" So that he tells us expreſly, we cannot find out the works of GOD, we do but know part of them. The queſtion which he puts, Job xxxvii. 16. "Doſt "thou know the wondrous works of him that is "perfect in knowledge?" can only be anſwered by the words of the Pſalmiſt, Pſal. civ. 24. "O "LORD, how wonderful are thy works! in wiſ-"dom haſt thou made them all." The work of redemption; in this there ſhines forth ſuch wiſdom, mercy, and love, as our underſtandings cannot reach; this work is called "the wiſdom of GOD in a my-"ſtery," hidden wiſdom, σοφία ἀποκεκρυμμένη, 1 Cor. ii. 7. The mercy, and grace, and love of it is called, "The riches of GOD's mercy, and the exceed-"ing riches of his grace," Eph. ii. 4, 7. Now

riches

riches is when you cannot tell the utmoſt of them, *pauperis eſt numerare.* Eph. iii. 18, 19. "That "ye may be able to comprehend with all ſaints, what "is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, "and to know the love of CHRIST, which paſſeth "knowledge." When we have the largeſt apprehenſions of this love, ſo that we think we comprehend it and know it, "it paſſeth knowledge;" yea, the effects of GOD's power and love, which he manifeſts in believers, are unſpeakable; for "he is able to "do for us exceeding abundantly above what we "can aſk or think, according to the power which "worketh in us," Eph. iii. 20. The peace which guards their ſouls "paſſeth all underſtanding," Phil. iv. 7. Thoſe joys which fill their hearts are not to be expreſſed; 1 Pet. i. 8. we read of "joy "unſpeakable and full of glory." The happineſs which they hope for is inconceiveable; it is that which "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath "entered into the heart of man, which GOD hath "laid up for us."

The ways of GOD's providence are not to be traced, Pſal. lxxvii. 19. "Thy way is in the ſea, and "thy paths in the great waters, and thy footſteps "are not known." Eccleſ. iii. 11. "No man "can find out the work that GOD maketh from "the beginning to the end." We are but of yeſterday, and know nothing. When we look upon GOD's providence, we take a part from the whole, and conſider it by itſelf, without relation to the whole ſeries of his diſpenſation; we cannot ſee the whole of GOD's providence at one view, and never ſee from the beginning of the works of GOD to the end; therefore our knowledge of them muſt needs be very imperfect, and full of miſtakes, and falſe judgments

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of things; we cannot, by our petty and ſhort-ſighted deſigns, judge of the works of GOD, and the deſigns of providence; for "our ways are not as "his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts; but "as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo are his "ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our "thoughts," Iſa. lv. 8, 9. The ways of GOD's mercy, Pſal. ciii. "As the heavens are high above "the earth, ſo great is GOD's mercy." Pſal. cxxxix. 17, 18. "How precious are thy thoughts unto me? "how great is the ſum of them? If I ſhould count "them, they are more in number than the ſand." And the ways of GOD's judgments; the ſeverity and greatneſs of his judgment is not known, Pſal. xc. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? And "who may ſtand before thee when thou art angry?" And the reaſons of his judgments are unſearchable, Pſal. xxxvi. 6. "Thy judgments are a great deep." Rom. xi. 35. "How unſearchable are his judg-"ments, and his ways paſt finding out!" Theſe are the inſtances on the part of the object.

2. On the part of the ſubject, or the perſons capable of knowing GOD in any meaſure. The perfect knowledge of GOD is above a finite creature's underſtanding. Wicked men are ignorant of GOD, and full of falſe apprehenſions of him; the ſcripture gives this deſcription of them; they are thoſe that "know not GOD," 2 Theſſ. i. 7. Wicked men are ſo far from knowing GOD to perfection, that they have hardly any true knowledge of him; for as the man himſelf is, ſo will GOD ſeem to be to him; the idea and notions which men have of GOD, is but the picture of their own complexion. To a true knowledge there is required likeneſs; a man's mind muſt be like the thing he would underſtand;

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therefore the apostle tells us, "the natural," or "animal man, doth not receive the things of GOD," he is not capable of them, because his mind is unsuitable to them, he is πλήρης τοῦ σώματος, full of body, and he cannot relish spiritual things; even those natural notions which wicked men have of GOD, are strangely tinctured and obscured by the temper of the man; they are *lux sepulta in opacâ materiâ*, light buried and hid in matter and darkness, in the blackness of a foul and impure heart; so that there is no question of them, whether they comprehend GOD or not.

But good men "cannot find out GOD," they have some false apprehensions of him; all their apprehensions are dark, have much of obscurity in them; they know GOD to salvation, but not to perfection; in this life we do but know GOD in part, that is, in comparison of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will instance yet higher; the angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, though they have true apprehensions of GOD, yet they do not arrive to perfect knowledge of him, they cannot *pervestigare ultima*, know the utmost of GOD; the cherubims themselves are continually looking at the mercy seat. To which the apostle alludes, 1 Pet. i. 12. when he tells us, the mystery of GOD's mercy in the gospel was a thing which the angels desired to pry into. In heaven "that which is in part shall be done away," that is, our knowledge shall be as perfect as our natures are capable; but it shall be finite. When we shall "see "GOD face to face," that is, have an immediate vision of him, "and see him as he is," that is, not having our understandings tinctured by any lust or passion that may darken our mind, or misrepresent the object; for the apostle tells us, "we shall see, him, be-

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"cauſe we ſhall be like him;" yet then we ſhall have ſhort and undequate apprehenſions of him, we ſhall ſtill retain our limited natures and finite underſtandings.

II. By way of conviction. Doſt thou know perfectly the nature of a finite ſpirit, the perfection and the power of an angel, how being immaterial they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no reſiſtance to a ſpirit? Doſt thou know how they can move themſelves to a great diſtance in a moment, and dart themſelves from one part of the world to another? Doſt thou know how man is "formed in "the loweſt parts of the earth," as the Pſalmiſt expreſſeth it; and the curious frame of our bodies is wrought from ſuch rude principles in ſo dark a ſhop? Canſt thou give an account how the ſoul is united to the body, by what bands or holds a ſpirit is ſo cloſely and intimately conjoined to matter? Doſt thou know how thy ſelf underſtandeſt any thing, and canſt retain the diſtinct ideas and notions of ſo many objects without confuſion? Doſt thou know the leaſt parts of matter, how they are knit together; and by what cement they cleave ſo faſt to one another, that they can hardly be ſeparated?

Now if the creatures be ſo unſearchable, and the knowledge of theſe be too hard for thee; is not the creator of them much more incomprehenſible, who poſſeſſeth all theſe perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a creature? If in natural and ſenſible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus*; how much more is it true of GOD, that our ignorance is more than our knowledge; when the whole earth and all the creatures bear no proportion to him? Iſa. xl. 15, 17. "Behold all the nations "of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as

" the ſmall duſt of the balance; all nations before " him are nothing, and are accounted to him leſs " than nothing."

III. By ſhewing you the clear reaſon of it, which is this, the diſproportion between the faculty and the object, the finiteneſs of our underſtandings, and the infiniteneſs of the divine nature and perfections. " GOD is greater than our hearts," and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the apoſtle reaſons, 1 John iii. 20. ſo he is more than can be known by us; he is too vaſt an object for our underſtanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou may'ſt as well mete out the heaven with a ſpan, and meaſure the waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the duſt of the earth in a little urn, and weigh the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a little balance, as think to circumſcribe GOD in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compaſs of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vaſtneſs and greatneſs of the object; but the glory and reſplendency of it, does ſo dazzle our ſight, that we cannot perfectly ſee it, 2 Tim. vi. 16. " He dwelleth in light which no man " can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor " can ſee." As GOD is too big, ſo he is too bright an object for our underſtandings; the preſence of his glory over-powers our minds, and bears down our faculties, and conquers our underſtandings.

I come now to apply this doctrine of the incomprehenſibleneſs of the divine nature. If the nature, and perfections, and ways, and works of GOD be incomprehenſible, and paſt finding out;

I. It calls for our admiration, and veneration, and reverence. Theſe are the beſt apprehenſions of him that is incomprehenſible; a ſilent veneration of his excel-

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excellencies, is the beſt acknowledgment of them. We muſt admire what we cannot apprehend or expreſs, Zach. ix. 17. "How great is his goodneſs, "and how great is his beauty?" The beſt way to celebrate the praiſes of GOD, is that which Nehemiah uſeth, Nehem. ix. 5. "And bleſſed be thy "glorious name, which is exalted above all bleſſing "and praiſe." Whenever we ſpeak or think of GOD, we neceſſarily detract from his perfections; but even this neceſſity is glorious to him, and this ſpeaks his perfection, that the higheſt finite underſtanding muſt have imperfect thoughts of him.

We ſhould make up in reverence and veneration what we fall ſhort of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of diſtance; by our reverence of the divine majeſty, we ſhould beſt awe our hearts, in a ſenſe of the diſtance which is between his infinite nature and perfection, and our finite apprehenſions. Worldly greatneſs will cauſe wonder, the thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence; how much more ſhould thoſe excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine! Iſa. vi. you have there GOD repreſented "ſitting upon his throne," and the "ſeraphims about him," which are deſcribed to us as "having each ſix wings, and with twain "they cover their faces." Creatures of the brighteſt underſtanding, and the moſt exalted purity and holineſs, "cover their faces" in the preſence of GOD's glory, they chooſe rather to venerate GOD than look upon him.

II. This calls for humility and modeſty. The conſideration of GOD's unſearchable perfections ſhould make "the haughtineſs of man to ſtoop, and bring "down his proud looks, and GOD alone ſhould be "exalted." The thought of GOD's excellency

ſhould

ſhould abaſe us, and make us "vile in our own "eyes," it ſhould make all thoſe petty excellencies that we pride ourſelves in, to vaniſh and diſappear. "Thoſe treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge" which are in GOD, ſhould "hide pride from man." It ſhould hide thoſe little parts and gifts which we are ſo apt to glory in, as the ſun hides the ſtars. When we conſider GOD, we ſhould be ſo far from admiring ourſelves, that we ſhould with an humble thankfulneſs wonder that GOD ſhould regard ſuch inconſiderable nothings as we are, Pſal. viii. 1, 3, 4. "O "LORD our GOD, how excellent is thy name in all "the earth, who haſt ſet thy glory above the hea-"vens! When I conſider the heavens, the work of "thy fingers, the moon and the ſtars which thou "haſt ordained; what is man, that thou art mind-"ful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt "him? He that conſiders the glory of GOD, and the greatneſs of his works, will think ſo meanly of himſelf, that he will be aſtoniſhed that GOD ſhould mind him or viſit him. This is a noble ſtrain of humility in David, by which he acknowledgeth that the greateſt king of the earth, how conſiderable ſoever he may be in reſpect of men, is but a pitiful thing to GOD.

When we ſpeak to GOD, we ſhould do it with great humility, Eccleſ. v. 2, 3. "Let thy words be "few, for GOD is in heaven, and thou upon earth." We ſhould ſay to GOD, Job xxxvii. 19. "Teach "us what we ſhall ſay unto thee, for we cannot "order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs." And when we think or ſpeak of him, we ſhould do it with great modeſty, we ſhould not raſhly pronounce or determine any thing concerning GOD. Simonides being aſked, what GOD was? deſired one day's time

SERM. CLVI.

to conſider, then he deſired two, and then four. The more we think of GOD, the leſs peremptory ſhall we be in defining him. He that conſiders that GOD is incomprehenſible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmoſt of infinite power, and all the reaſons of GOD's ways and providences. He that rightly values his own ſhort underſtanding, and the unlimited perfections of GOD, will not be apt to ſay, this GOD cannot do, this he cannot know, ſuch ways are not agreeable to his wiſdom. He that knows GOD and himſelf, will be modeſt in theſe caſes, he will ἐπέχειν, abſtain from all peremptory pronouncing in theſe matters; he conſiders that one man many times differs ſo much from another in knowledge and ſkill of working, that he can do thoſe things which another believes impoſſible: but we have pitiful thoughts of GOD, if we think the difference between one man and another is any thing to the vaſt diſtance that is between the divine underſtanding and our ignorance, the divine power and our weakneſs, the wiſdom of GOD and the folly of men.

III. The incomprehenſibleneſs of GOD's perfections calls for the higheſt degree of our affection. How ſhould we fear this great glorious GOD! Pſal. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? "even according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath." Fear is the moſt infinite of all our paſſions, and fills us with the moſt endleſs jealouſy and ſuſpicions; GOD's wrath is greater than our fear, "according "to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath."

How ſhould we love him, when we are aſtoniſhed with admiration of GOD's goodneſs, and ſay, "how "great is thy goodneſs, and how great is thy beau-"ty? Behold, what manner of love the father hath "beſtowed

" beſtowed upon us !" How great ſhould our love be to him ! What manner of love ſhould we return to him ! SERM. CLVI.

This calls for the higheſt degree of our faith. With what confidence ſhould we rely upon him, " who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly " above what we can aſk or think !"

To conclude. This requires the higheſt degree of our ſervice : how ſhould our hearts be " enlarged to " run the ways of his commandments," who hath " laid up for us" ſuch things, " that eye hath " not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the " heart of man ?"

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